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Distributed Leadership

Full Report | Spring 2003



A review of literature carried out for NCSL by **Nigel Bennett**, **Christine Wise** and **Philip Woods**, The Open University, and **Janet A. Harvey**, University of Gloucestershire.



National College for School Leadership

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Introduction

This desk study was undertaken to provide an overview of current writing on distributed leadership. The study reviewed literature up to July 2002.

It was intended to investigate the extent to which:

- there was a common understanding of the term
- writing in the field covered both formal and informal leadership
- the literature provided practical advice to heads and other school leaders in developing distributed leadership within their organisations

This was to be achieved through a systematic trawl of the leadership literature related to both for-profit and not-for-profit organisations.

The research team was aware of the range of theoretical perspectives on organisational theory that might influence writers' interpretation of distributed leadership, and this breadth receives attention in the following report. However, the two key criteria in assessing the literature for inclusion were the extent to which each item:

- specifically addressed the concept of distributed leadership or very closely related concepts, and/or
- clearly addressed issues of practice directly related to it

This report consists of a short main section and an appendix. It begins with an outline of the methodology employed to establish the range of literature to be analysed in detail, and the arrangements through which consistent standards and criteria were achieved across the research team. The findings are then discussed. These consist of our overall discussion of the literature we read, drawing out what appear to be the key factors that need considering if we are to obtain an agreed and robust, evidence based understanding of distributed leadership. We also draw some conclusions about the implications for the continuing professional development of educational leaders and their teaching colleagues, and make some suggestions for further research in this area.

In addition, Appendix 1 (see page 15) presents a detailed discussion of each book or article reviewed.

Method

An extensive literature search was undertaken using a wide range of possible keywords. It was anticipated that most literature related to the concept of distributed leadership would be recent, so the team initially decided to restrict the search to writings published or presented at conferences since 1988. We reasoned that should the results of the search be disappointing, we could always extend it to earlier writing.

Bringing forward the cut-off publication date to 1996 made almost no difference. This second search was then filtered by identifying the shorter articles in journals, which were likely to be either publicising and simplifying work presented in more detail elsewhere, or presenting anecdotal material. Having eliminated very short articles – those of five pages or less – we then identified authors represented by multiple publications in the list. Visual scanning of the titles and dates of these publications led to the selection of one publication from each author.

Further filtering was carried out by reducing to four the number of keywords that appeared to be most closely related to the topic. These were:

- delegated leadership
- democratic leadership
- dispersed leadership
- distributed leadership

This limitation on the keywords gave us a total of 80 citations to examine further.

This latest list was circulated to all colleagues in the Open University Centre for Educational Policy and Management, with an invitation to comment on it. In particular, they were asked to indicate:

- any publications or papers on the list which they knew, and judged to have no relevance to the subject of the review, and
- any publications or papers which they knew and judged relevant to the subject of the review, which were absent from the listing

This activity was also undertaken by the project team.

Whilst this work was being undertaken, the project team also developed further the draft protocol that was included in the original proposal to the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). To do this, a number of works were selected and read by all members of the review team. Our responses were then discussed and amendments made progressively to the protocol until it was clear that all four members of the team were interpreting it similarly and judging their reading on comparable criteria.

With the help of the Open University library, abstracts were obtained for as many of the citations on this list as could be found that were not available electronically from the library. Some citations were discarded at this stage, leaving the publications and papers which formed the initial basis of this report.

In the final stage, the reviews of each researcher, including the papers that we all read, were discussed and collated. Further discussions were held to draw together our understanding of the concept of distributed leadership and to consider the implications of our work for leadership practice, preparation and research. As this work was carried out, careful attention was paid to the field, and newly available work, both published and in unpublished forms, such as conference papers, were incorporated into the analysis. In addition, discussions among the course team sometimes led us to explore some theoretical or conceptual discussions that appeared to be drawn on by the writers examined.

The detailed discussion of every publication reviewed for the desk study is provided in Appendix 1 below.

Findings

Summary evaluation of the strength of the research evidence

Relatively few of the empirical studies examined in this review employed what might be considered traditionally robust social scientific data in the sense that the EPPI reviews might accept (Bharki *et al.* (1998), Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), Phillips (2000, 2001), Portin (1998)). We judge the data from the five statistical or experimental studies analysed to be robust, although it is appropriate to acknowledge the limitations that their authors place upon their work as well as making our own comments. We judge the data and arguments put forward by these studies to be suggestive rather than conclusive.

A similar judgement can be made about the cross-cultural studies we identified (Kets de Vries (1999), Bryant (2003), Brytting and Trollestad (2000), Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) Mahony and Moos (1998).

We also have two major conceptual discussions of distributed leadership, by Spillane *et al.* (2001) and Gronn (2002). Spillane's study presents a small amount of data in the shape of three vignettes drawn from their research, whilst Gronn reanalyses a number of studies to test the utility of his theorisation of the term. Both are important as indicators of the kinds of research that might be undertaken to strengthen our understandings of the forms of leadership activity that might be regarded as distributed. Once again, as these authors would acknowledge, their writings are suggestive of further development rather than conclusive, and the same judgement can be made, too, of the conceptual studies of related views of leadership by Allix (2000), Starratt (2001) and Wenger (2000).

Most of the empirical studies examined in this report are forms of qualitative case studies in organisational settings. There is a wide variety of scale and focus within them, but most of them are small-scale activities.

This overall judgement of the strength and robustness of the data summarised in this report, however, should not be seen as criticising the work reviewed. Rather, it provides us with a set of propositions about the nature of distributed leadership and some possible lines of further research to explore and test the theory further.

Disparate definitions

There are few clear definitions of distributed or devolved leadership and those that exist appear to differ from each other, sometimes widely and sometimes more in nomenclature than in essence. One of the most restricted definitions of distributed leadership is that of Kayworth and Leidner (2000), who define distributed leadership as leadership from a remote (physical) location, using only technological means of communication (e-mail, web-based etc). However, most conceptions of distributed leadership tend to be much broader than this.

The nature of distributed leadership

It is evident that the concept of distributed leadership has a variety of meanings, and that some of these meanings (explicitly and/or implicitly) resemble earlier notions such as collegiality. This prompts the question of whether there is a conception of distributed leadership which takes understanding of leadership further than a re-naming of previous ideas. Our conclusion is that it is

possible to identify elements that suggest what may be distinctive about the concept of distributed leadership, but that within this significant differences can be identified.

What follows is not a summation of the approaches we have reviewed (since these differ and are not capable of being reconciled into one theory), but is our interpretative construction formed on the basis of the review. We put forward three distinctive elements of the concept of distributed leadership.

Firstly, distributed leadership highlights leadership as an *emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals*. This contrasts with leadership as a phenomenon which arises from the individual. Gronn's work is helpful in explicating and elaborating this. What is most distinctive about the notion of distributed leadership is summed up in the second of the meanings identified by Gronn, namely *concertive action*. Contrasted with numerical or additive action (which is the aggregated effect of a number of individuals contributing their initiative and expertise in different ways to a group or organisation), concertive action is about the additional dynamic which is the product of conjoint activity. Where people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise, the outcome is a product or energy which is greater than the sum of their individual actions. There is a tendency in some studies to fall back into structure/agency dualism, whereby leadership is *either* the result of structural relationships *or* the result of individual action. Both activity theory and analytical dualism seek to supersede this. Gronn's view of distributed leadership holds to their wider view.

Secondly, distributed leadership suggests *openness of the boundaries of leadership*. This means that it is predisposed to widen the conventional net of leaders, thus in turn raising the question of which individuals and groups are to be brought into leadership or seen as contributors to it. Of itself, the notion of distributed leadership does not suggest how wide that boundary should be set. However, equally, there are no limits built into the concept.

This openness is not limited merely to the extent to which the conventional net is widened within a particular community. It also raises the question of the *boundaries of the community within which leadership is distributed*. Much of the literature we studied examined the concept of distributed leadership in relation to the teachers in the school. However, there are other members of the school community whose roles need to be considered. In particular, what is the role of the pupil or student body in relation to distributed leadership?

Thirdly, distributed leadership entails the view that *varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few*. Related to openness of the boundaries of leadership is the idea that numerous, distinct, germane perspectives and capabilities can be found in individuals spread through the group or organisation. If these are brought together it is possible to forge a concertive dynamic which represents more than the sum of the individual contributors. Initiatives may be inaugurated by those with relevant skills in a particular context, but others will then adopt, adapt and improve them within a mutually trusting and supportive culture.

If distributed leadership is to be seen as distinctive from other formulations of leadership, it is the first of these characteristics – leadership as the product of concertive or conjoint activity, emphasising it as an emergent property of a group or network – which will underpin it. From this perspective, distributed leadership is an important analytical tool for thinking about leadership and re-orientating thinking about its nature.

There are specific forms of distributed leadership which involve differing features and contexts: different structures, ways of working, aims and values, and ethical and other considerations concerning matters such as rights to participation. In these specific manifestations there are numerous overlaps with other notions of leadership – collegiality, democratic, and so on.

Distributed leadership in essence might be seen as an *analytical orientation* to leadership, which leaves open – in fact, requires – choices and priorities to be made concerning its operation, which create varying tangible types and forms of distributed leadership. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge Gronn's concern that, as distributed leadership becomes a preferred approach to leadership among public policy makers, we should be paying attention to its possible disadvantages, as well as exploring its potential benefits.

Several variable features are discernible from the literature reviewed:

- *Control/autonomy.* This is a major variable. In some conceptions and manifestations the emphasis is on constraints from higher levels in the hierarchy or the context in which the organisation works. Certain goals or values are set by formally constituted leaders who are directly accountable to outsiders for the performance of the organisation, and are seen as non-negotiable (Graetz, 2000). This contrasts with an emphasis on a greater degree of autonomy for those who contribute to leadership, including the ability to review and possibly amend underpinning values and aims (Keyes *et al.* 1999). This is not to assume that non-negotiable values and aims are always inappropriate. However, it is true to say that these always emanate from a decision about values and priorities and are, ultimately, not givens.
- *Organisational structure and agency.* Different emphases are possible in relation to these. Some approaches to the practice and study of distributed leadership concentrate on the organisational structuring of leadership more than the perspectives, motives, and 'theories in use' of individuals; or vice versa. This distinction was observed in comparing studies such as Harris and Chapman (2002), Spillane *et al.* (2001), and Goodman *et al.* (2001). Whilst in the particular circumstances of an organisation an emphasis at one point on, for example, structural change in order to provide an impetus to distributed leadership may be appropriate, in general terms (as suggested above) holding to a confined perspective on one side or other of a structure/agency dualism is limiting.
- *Social and cultural context.* This has a significant bearing on distributed leadership. For example, the social and cultural context may act in a positive way to create and sustain the conditions for distributed leadership to flourish, as suggested by Knight and Trowler (2001) and identified by both Bryant (2003) and Kets de Vries (1999). Their studies draw attention particularly to the significance of the wider, external social and cultural context, in the light of which we might ask how far distributed leadership can be achieved in a directive, hierarchical society. Mahoney and Moos (1998) raise a similar point. At the same time, internal organisational culture exerts its own influence. The cultural history of an organisation is significant. Brytting and Trollestad (2000) and Coad (2000) both highlight the effect of a sustained culture of non-participation which can result in passivity when new participative opportunities are offered. The nature of the new, developing organisational culture, where a more distributed leadership style is being encouraged, is also significant. For example, values such as commitment to truth and enquiry (Ayas and Zenuik, 2001) and trust (Abzug and Phelps, 1998) are highly important components of a culture which encourages distributed leadership.
- *Source of change.* The impetus for developing distributive leadership can arise from a variety of sources. Firstly, as Bickmore (2001) suggests, policy issues or ideas *external* to the formal members of an organisation can provide a stimulus for rethinking leadership. This is likely to result in a structural re-organisation, although the values underpinning the organisational members' reaction to these external pressures will have an impact on this restructuring. Senior formal leaders are likely to be significant influences upon the development of such restructuring.

This suggests that a second impetus towards the development of a distributed leadership style or structure may be found in the shape of a 'top down' initiative from a strong or charismatic leader. A number of the studies we examined (Blase and Blase (1999), Campbell *et al.* (no date), Gold *et al.* (2002)) which offered some empirical data in support of their arguments seemed to identify the headteacher/principal as a source of the initiatives they studied. Although at first sight the concept of distributed leadership may appear to stand at odds with strong senior leadership, there is no necessary contradiction. Indeed, the view of distributed leadership as concerted action through relationships allows for strong partners in relationships which at the same time entail power disparities between them.

A third impetus may be a 'bottom up' initiative from within the organisation or from a community that represents part of the organisation. This is more likely to occur as an action response to a formal policy requirement from within the organisation, or to some externally experienced pressure such as might result from the activities of a professional association. Such 'bottom-up' initiatives place a pressure on senior staff to determine how to respond to what could represent a significant cultural challenge to existing or preferred leadership arrangements. Bickmore (2001) provides a good example of how simultaneous external policy demands and internal responses to these demands by staff can interact.

- *Positional/informal leadership.* The degree to which informal leaders are involved in the process of distributed leadership may vary. A 'top down' initiative may acknowledge existing informal power or leadership relationships within the community, but need not do so. In any case, it will incorporate them into the more formal leadership structures in ways seen as appropriate by the senior staff who are creating the distributive structure or culture. A 'bottom up' initiative is more likely to derive from individuals or groups within the organisation who are seen by colleagues as having a leadership role. The success of such an initiative may depend upon an attempt to bring into line the formal and informal leaders within the organisation (Silva *et al.* 2000). Further, it may require senior staff to adapt their leadership practice more substantially because that adaptation may challenge their underpinning values and perceptions of 'good practice' more than a 'top down' approach.
- *Dynamics of team working.* The literature on teams, with its emphases on collaboration, multiple and complementary strengths and expertises, and the need for all members to share a common view of both the purposes of the team and its means of working, has similarities to much of the discussion of distributed leadership (Karkkainen, 2000). In its argument that team activity can amount to more than the aggregate sum of individual action, the literature on teams sounds very similar to the argument for concertive action outlined by Gronn (2002). Further, writers on teams frequently distinguish between formally structured teams and teams that are created on an *ad hoc* basis to carry out specific projects, with the *ad hoc* groups needing to recreate a consensus about ways of working. Both kinds of teams operate best in an open climate, where relationships are based on trust, mutual protection and support, and such a climate within the organisation as a whole will assist *ad hoc* groups to create an agreed *modus operandi* more quickly and easily. Ideally, both intra-team and inter-team relationships will be based on networks, and will demonstrate open communication and strong shared common goals, values and beliefs. Members will tend to subordinate their own objectives to those of the group.
- *Institutional and spontaneous forms of distributed leadership.* Distributed leadership may be given long-term institutional form through team structures, committees, etc. However, running through the distributed leadership literature reviewed there is a strong theme of fluid leadership, resting on expertise rather than position, exercised through changing *ad hoc* groups created on the basis of immediate and relevant expertise. Such fluid leadership will only be possible within a climate of trust and mutual support which becomes an integral part

of the internal organisational social and cultural context. Moreover, such a climate implies a blurring of the distinction between 'leaders' and 'followers'. It may therefore have to co-exist with any formal accountability structure that has been created within the organisation.

- *Conflict resolution.* This discussion has to be set against contemporary argument around accountability and goal setting. Effective teams will also have ways of facing and resolving conflict. Distributed leadership in action also needs such means of conflict resolution, that may have to operate across a much larger arena than would be necessary in smaller departmental, pastoral or project teams. Depending on the source of the initiative towards creating an organisation that demonstrates the characteristics of distributed leadership, and the degree to which senior leaders are able to 'let go' of their overarching control, such approaches to conflict resolution may be hierarchical, directed by a single leader, or more collegial, through conjoint or shared leadership.

Some implications for professional development

A number of implications for leadership preparation and the continuing professional development (CPD) of school leaders can be identified from the literature on distributed leadership. Some of these are already taken into consideration by the providers of such programmes. It is important to note that these implications are not limited to the professional development of head teachers, but have much wider implications.

- *Extending the reach of leadership programmes and CPD.* If everyone in the school has the potential to act as a leader in relation to particular issues, and may, in some formulations of the concept, have wide-ranging involvement in decisions throughout the school, then it is important that they should have access to opportunities for leadership development. Development for distributed leadership practice therefore should not be limited to senior staff, nor even to 'middle leaders'. Such professional development should cover, at a minimum:
 - basic ideas in leadership and management
 - working constructively in teams, including conflict resolution
 - negotiating the boundaries of leadership (concerning the involvement of diverse participants from different levels in the hierarchy, including students and members of the school's external community)
 - the role of informal leadership alongside and interacting with formal leadership
 - the importance of a school culture which supports distributed leadership, and ways by which this culture can be developed
- *Alternative modes of delivery: creating more opportunities for the group, team, whole school, etc. to be the focus for a CPD event or programme.* Defining distributed leadership as an emergent property existing in relationships, rather than an activity carried out by an individual or individuals, has implications for all leadership preparation and professional development. Firstly, there needs to be a focus on the development and nurturing of conjoint leadership relations. Secondly, the subject of leadership development programmes should not always, or perhaps usually, be the individual leader. Programmes are needed for various different groups, which may be teams, departments, ad hoc working groups, the whole school, etc. An imaginative and flexible approach to this is imperative.

- *Teamwork skills.* Closely related to this, a crucial dimension of preparation for distributed leadership is strong teamwork skills. Whilst much work is already done in this area, it should be considered whether attention needs to be paid to the wider implications of teamwork on an organisational basis. An important part of this for senior staff would be the creation of a new understanding of 'followership' that emphasises its fluid location, and its interactive, two-way relationship with the equally fluid location of 'leadership'. This applies especially in relation to senior leaders' perception of more junior staff. The most successful and effective heads and senior staff already do this, but it is not a universal trait.
- *Addressing culture and cultural change.* Leadership development needs to address directly the significance of culture and cultural change. In order to flourish effectively, distributed leadership and concertive action require a context in which the social and cultural characteristics highlighted above are embedded, or at least developing. This re-enforces the point that the evolution of distributed leadership needs to be supported through whole-community or group CPD, as well as individual professional development. Carefully handled, and focused on all levels of formal and informal seniority within the school, this attention to cultural change would also have the potential to support the development of individual skills. Whole-school school improvement interventions may be a helpful starting point in the development of such initiatives.
- *Facilitating situational and organisational analysis.* The absence of significant levels of empirical research into distributed leadership makes it difficult to start to generate 'best practice' programmes. However, there is some evidence in the studies examined here that distributed leadership in practice is strongly dependent upon circumstances. If this is so, then a crucial dimension of developing both the culture and the structural operation of distributed leadership, and also of identifying strategies of innovation and support, will be to analyse accurately the nature of the situations in which leaders find themselves. Organisational analysis would therefore appear to be a crucial dimension of professional development for staff at all levels within the organisation.
- *Opening up the choices inherent in developing distributed leadership.* One of the emerging themes from this review is that distributed leadership is an analytical orientation that *requires* choices and priorities to be made concerning its operation. This concerns not only matters relating to the institutional or *ad hoc* forms it may take, but also questions concerning boundaries of leadership and the degrees of control and autonomy to be inscribed into it, all of which raises issues of values, educational purpose and so on. Opportunities to understand these better and to gain from others' experiences would be an essential part of a comprehensive programme of CPD on distributed leadership.

Some implications for further research into distributed leadership

As the concept of distributed leadership is in its infancy, but is generating such enthusiasm, it is important that a sound research programme be established to examine and influence the ways in which it is developed, and to assess its effectiveness. This research should include both a focus on substantive issues relating to the development, practice and effectiveness of distributed leadership and also, in view of the continuing concern about the quality and generalisability of educational research, the methodological issues involved in conducting such research. NCSL is well placed to create and co-ordinate such a programme of research.

We would suggest the following areas of work as being worth attention in the development of a research programme in this area.

- There is a clear need for a substantial research programme to identify, document and analyse those *leadership practices* that appear to contribute to the creation and maintenance of distributed leadership. This could include investigation of the:
 - impact of different degrees of emphasis on variables such as *control* and *autonomy*, and *organisational structure* and *individual agency*
 - role of *informal leadership* alongside and interacting with *formal leadership*
 - means of dealing with *conflict resolution*
- A further research focus, also strongly related to the practice of distributed leadership, is *the social and cultural context* within which it exists. It is important to establish the impact of situational constraints and circumstances on successful strategies of development and systems maintenance. If, as some of the literature seems to suggest, distributed leadership can be analysed in terms of *contingency theory*, this is an important line of research.
- Much more needs to be known about the various forms distributed leadership can take, especially the practice and challenges of *spontaneous and ad hoc forms of distributed leadership* which characterise the idea of fluid leadership highlighted above and the *dynamics of team-working*.
- An important theme that was identified in this study was that of *the source of change*: whether distributed leadership is created by senior staff as part of a 'vision' of the school, or represents a harnessing into a school-wide culture of pre-existing forms of leadership practice. Issues around autonomy, control, creation and facilitation as factors in both developing and sustaining distributed leadership should be investigated.
- Developing from this point, it would be desirable to compare distributed leadership in practice across a variety of differently conceived school communities. The practice and impact of distributed leadership in schools where the *boundary of leadership* is widely drawn would be of particular interest. Cultures of distributed leadership that included within their community non-teaching staff, or the students in the school, might be hypothesised to be different from those which limited the distribution to the teaching staff. There is an absence of evidence on this.
- A sound database is needed on which to assess the effectiveness of distributed leadership strategies in raising school achievement. *The relationship between distributed leadership and learning* is a crucially important issue, but there are no data at all on this. Although Harris and Chapman (2002) identified democratic, distributed and other leadership characteristics that they associated with improving schools in challenging circumstances (as defined by OFSTED), more details of their data need to be seen. In any case, considerably more data are required before there can be confidence about which forms of distributed leadership may have significant positive educational consequences. There are three aspects to the kinds of further research needed:
 - studies which test and seek to replicate research findings
 - investigation of the effectiveness of distributed leadership strategies in raising school achievement, in a variety of internal and external contexts

- methodologically diverse studies, for example: investigations comparing improving and non-improving schools, or using different measures of success; longitudinal studies; comparative cross-case studies

In addition to these substantive areas of research, we suggest that there is a strong case for examining the methodologies that might be appropriate for researching into distributed leadership. In particular, it is important to consider how replicatory and longitudinal studies can be designed and undertaken in ways that can allow the attribution of cause and effect, or sound inferences concerning influence, on the basis of robust data. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) demonstrated how a quantitative replicatory study can be undertaken into leadership effectiveness. More fine-grained qualitative studies are more difficult to replicate, and generalising from their data is more problematic, but they do have their distinct advantages such as the insights they are able to give to interacting influences, the effects of cultures and the impact of contextual factors. Distinctive to the notion of distributed leadership as concertive action is the challenge of undertaking research into it as an emergent property of interacting individuals and gaining insight into the dynamics which operate between or 'stretching across' individuals. Innovative ways of doing this or applying it to leadership studies, drawing on anthropological and ethnographic techniques, are likely to prove fruitful.

An attempt to develop and refine such methods in relation to distributed leadership would both create more certainty about other leadership-related research the College might commission and also contribute helpfully to the continuing debate about the quality and generalisability of educational research.

Concluding remarks

We acknowledge that the range of studies examined and reported on here is necessarily selective. Limited by time, our search has not accessed and reviewed all potentially relevant studies. Work brought to our attention most recently, such as the detailed work by Silins and Mulford (2002) drawn on by Alma Harris for her keynote lecture at the BELMAS conference in October (2002), has not been included for reasons of time. Discussions towards the end of the study have suggested that work on co-principals and shared leadership, notably that undertaken in New Zealand, may have had more potential relevance to the study than our search has suggested.

What this study has sought to provide is access to a range of materials that provides potential insight into the nature of distributed leadership, offers ideas for the professional development of school leaders at all levels of the organisation, and suggests future routes for research. Notwithstanding its inevitable selectivity in the literature reviewed, we hope it provides a sound and useful basis for the College's work in this increasingly important field.

Appendix 1: Readings

In this appendix we examine briefly each of the studies that were reviewed for this report.

A disparate field

There are few clear definitions of distributed or devolved leadership and those that exist appear to differ from each other, sometimes widely and sometimes more in nomenclature than in essence. Problems inevitably arise because there are already so many different definitions of leadership. Equally numerous are the ways of defining the difference between leadership and management. Moreover, Knight and Trowler (2001: 28) suggest there are differences of emphasis between leading (defined as involving 'social actions intended to identify and facilitate the fulfilment of the perceived goals of a work group or organisation'), leadership (used in two different senses, as 'the skilled or artistic performance of leading ... and as the enactment of a formal or informal leading role'), as well as differences between leading/leadership and management ('the performance or delegation of operational tasks to accomplish predesignated goals of a grouping'). One of the most restricted definitions of distributed leadership is that of Kayworth and Leidner (2000), who define distributed leadership as leadership from a remote (physical) location, using only technological means of communication (e-mail, web-based etc). However, most conceptions of distributed leadership tend to be much broader than this.

Gronn's analytical scheme

Amongst the studies reviewed, Peter Gronn's work comprises the most sophisticated attempt to develop a conceptual description of distributed leadership. His focus on leadership as concertive action (the idea of distributed leadership being more than the sum of its parts) is of particular interest. Gronn has developed a taxonomy of distributed leadership (too detailed to include in this report) which can be used to help frame further work on the incidence, effects and development of distributed leadership. The sophistication of Gronn's analysis reflects the wide variations in the practice and context of distributed leadership.

Gronn, P. (2002) Distributed Leadership. In K. Leithwood, P. Hallinger, K. Seashore-Louis, G. Furman-Brown, P. Gronn, W. Mulford and K. Riley (eds) Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration, (Dordrecht: Kluwer)

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Gronn's work on distributed leadership addresses it as a phenomenon that is widely present across organisations and takes a variety of forms. He develops the concept as an analytical tool for understanding this growing aspect of leadership in practice. Some of its forms may be in hierarchical settings, where the power of subordinates is held within constraints determined by superiors, but it may also be present in groups and organisations where relationships are more equal. Gronn defines leadership as 'emergent work-related influence' (p.7) and identifies two broad meanings of distributed leadership in the scholarly community:

- i. Numerical or additive, which refers to 'the *aggregated leadership behaviour* of some, many or all of the members of an organisation or an organisational sub-unit', leadership which is 'dispersed rather than concentrated' (p.3, emphasis added). This is the most commonly used sense of distributed leadership and is contrasted with focused leadership.

- ii. Distributed leadership as *concertive action*, in which distributed leadership is more than the sum of its parts. This meaning of distributed leadership is about the leadership which emerges from '*multi-member organisational groupings*' (p.28, emphasis added) and is defined as 'the demonstrated or presumed structuring influence attributable to organisation members acting in concert' (p.28). This is the most significant meaning of distributed leadership for Gronn. Central to the idea of distributed leadership is not the agency of individuals, but 'structurally constrained conjoint agency, or the concertive labour performed by pluralities of interdependent organisation members' (p.28). Gronn observes three main patterns in concertive action (pp.4–5):
 - a) *Spontaneous collaboration* concerning tasks. Leadership is evident in the *interaction and relationships* in which people with different skills, expertise and from different organisational levels 'coalesce' to pool expertise and regularise conduct for the duration of the task (p.5).
 - b) *Shared role* which *emerges* between two or more people, involving close joint working 'within an *implicit framework of understanding*' [emphasis added] and emergent 'intuitive understandings' (p.6).
 - c) *Institutionalisation* of structures of working together (concertive mechanisms), eg a committee.

To explore the concept of distributed leadership, Gronn utilises activity theory, drawing from Engeström (1999, 2000), which emphasises jointly performed activity, the centrality of the division of labour, fluidity of relationships, the degrees of freedom open to social actors, and the internal dynamic of the activity system that enables change as small shifts from the present to one of a number of possibilities. Activity theory might be summarised as describing social life as a process of ever-moving relationships between technologies, nature, ideas (concepts), persons and communities, in which the focus of action circulates to one person, then another, according to the social and environmental context and the flow of action within this. One person can initiate change, with others following, contributing and adding to or altering it in various ways. Their actions react back and alter the conditions, relationships, rules etc of that context. In short, the flow of activity involves the *circulation of initiative*. From prior writing by Gronn, it is clear he is also influenced by the sociological theory of analytical dualism and advocates, in effect, a critical realist approach which emphasises 'emergence' (pp.39–40).

Contradictions are a dynamic catalyst for change in the perspective of activity theory. Contradictions, in Engeström's work, 'become part of an intervention strategy for the transformation of work, in which activity theory itself acts as a mediating device for the resolution of tensions in work practices' (Gronn, p.27).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Gronn (2002) bases and supports his theorising of distributed leadership with reference to a variety of empirical studies by researchers in a number of fields. He does not draw on original empirical work of his own (except referring to previous relevant research he has done). Nevertheless, a key claim is that the argument for distributed leadership is empirical:

The most compelling reason why the scholarly community requires a distributed perspective on leadership... is that this idea more accurately reflects the division of labour which confronts fieldworkers and is experienced on a daily basis by organisation members. (p.9)

Gronn also argues that there are contemporary factors driving interest in distributed leadership. It has practical appeal, especially given recruitment difficulties: '... it invites consideration of an organisation's overall capacity for leadership, rather than helping to perpetuate the idea of the power of one' (p.17). Awareness and appeal of distributed leadership is growing also because of (a) disillusionment with idea of 'visionary leader champions' and (b) organisational change (for example, flatter hierarchies, organisational learning).

Gronn suggests that distributed leadership has especial relevance and applicability in contemporary, information-rich society – 'Schools now operate in complex, data-rich task environments as never before' (p.18). This, according to Gronn, increases interdependence and reliance on new forms of co-ordination, 'both of which are highly conducive to the emergence of distributed leadership' (p.19). He refers later to 'the intensification of administrators' work' as the 'main pressure in schools' towards distributed leadership (p.23). This intensification – the result of 'state-sponsored new managerialism' – occurs 'in an expanding informational environment that exacerbates the Hayekian problem of distributed knowledge' (p.23). Thus Gronn appears to be suggesting an empirical trend, ie a growth in distributed leadership, and, related to this, a normative view, that distributed leadership is a more effective way of coping with a complex, information- rich society.

Gronn argues that distributed leadership has organisational advantages too. It enables organisations to capitalise on a range of strengths, individuals to strengthen their skills and attributes, and aids bonding. These advantages amount to 'an overall widening of the net of intelligence and organisational resourcefulness' (p.37), which has applicability to schools as organisations.

Four further points are worth noting with respect to Gronn's analysis:

- With regard to the empirical basis of distributed leadership, examples are given, though these could be interpreted as suggesting the ubiquity of distributed leadership but not demonstrating it.
- At a general level the evidence on fading leader-centrism (pp.10–12) , cited from the field, seems convincing, though the resilience of 'focused' leadership and the attraction of heroism is also emphasised in the article – which suggests a tension between Gronn's view on how the field is moving and the strength of contrary influences.
- With regard to organisational advantages of distributed leadership, illustrative evidence (from a number of studies) has force. This is persuasive rather than offering more substantial evidence of the beneficial effects, though this might be too hard a criticism of an article that makes great efforts to relate its theoretical arguments to empirical studies.
- The connection between information-rich society and distributed leadership seems reasonable, though the article does not question whether the nature of the data with which leadership needs to deal is appropriate or ought to be changed (ie it accepts this data-saturated, modern, capitalist society uncritically).

Detailed review of studies of distributed leadership

This section reports the detailed review of studies which explicitly address the concept of distributed leadership – except for Gronn's work which, because of the breadth of its analytical endeavour, is reviewed separately in the previous section.

Two of the variable features of distributed leadership highlighted in the report (Section 3.3 The Nature of Distributed Leadership) are control/autonomy and source of change. The former refers to the degree of hierarchical constraint on dispersed leaders; the latter refers to the different sources of initiative for distributing leadership. (The initiative for distributed leadership may, for example, arise from the upper echelons of an organisation, from other organisational levels or from cultural influences embedded in society.) These are key variables in understanding how the practice, experience and implications of distributed leadership may differ.

The studies discussed in this section are ordered according to source of initiative for distributed leadership, starting with those which give more emphasis to distributed leadership as emerging from top-down initiatives and moving to those which give greater emphasis to distributed leadership as emergent from more dispersed initiatives or influences. This represents a continuum of emphasis, rather than a binary classification. Authors of the studies, in order of discussion, are:

- Graetz
- Hartley and Allison
- Harris and Chapman
- Spillane, Halverson and Diamond
- Kets de Vries

Graetz, F. (2000) Strategic change leadership. Management Decision, 38(8): 550–562

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Case studies of three large companies undergoing change reported by Graetz offer a view of distributed leadership as a positive channel for change.

Organisations most successful in managing the dynamics of loose-tight working relationships meld strong 'personalised' leadership at the top with 'distributed' leadership, a group of experienced and trusted individuals operating at different levels of the organisation ...[ensuring]... integrated thinking and acting at all levels. All three cases illustrate how, if key stakeholders are not onside, particularly at the middle and lower levels of management they act as roadblocks to change, impeding the passage of the change process to those within their span of control. (p.556)

However, reliance on a strong leader at the top of the structure reduces the potential impact of their work because of the need for a key senior manager to transmit the leader's vision, which then sells the way forward to those below who are thus enabled to continue it. Distributed leadership, in this view, involves an active downward distribution of leadership roles through a fundamentally hierarchical organisational structure.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

In her study, Graetz (2000) used a 'qualitative case study approach' (p.551) to look at the change leadership style in three large organisations which are not education based. The styles found were compared against 'critical' roles outlined in the article and consideration was given as to how far these contributed to the outcome of the change process. The method is described as follows:

A series of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions was conducted on-site and ran from one to two hours. Interview transcripts were forwarded to all participants for comment. Follow-up calls and second interviews were conducted with some participants. Further data were obtained from documents made available to the researcher: published literature and in-house publications. (p.551)

However, we are not told who in the companies, either personnel or positions, were interviewed nor the numbers of people. Similarly we do not see any primary data to be able to judge the quality of the analysis. All three of the case studies are reported individually and then conclusions drawn across the three, in comparison with the literature, but the security of the analysis remains an issue.

Hartley, J. and Allison, M. (2000), *'The Role of Leadership in the Modernization and Improvement of Public Services'*, in *Public Money and Management*. April to June pp.35–40

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

For Hartley and Allison distributed leadership is exercised by those people who have constructed alliances, support, systems and collaborative cultures for inter-agency working. They see this as dispersed across the organisation. Their case study looked at 'forward moving' local government organisations. They consider distributed leadership to be the result of alliances and team working and a natural consequence of new collaborative ways of working and flatter structures. They do, however, have some concerns about whether political leadership, as found at the apex of local government structures, can co-exist with distributed leadership.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Hartley and Allison (2000) draw on case study methodology for their study of local authorities. Their four cases include different types of authority (county, metropolitan and district), from different contexts (predominately rural, predominately urban and mixed) and with different political control (Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Labour and no overall control). How these qualities might impact on the findings is difficult to assess as the number of case studies is insufficient to be able to control for any of the variables. The local authorities were chosen because they were demonstrating innovative ways of leading their local communities, engaging in major organisational and cultural change, which was aimed either at strengthening local governance or at achieving more 'citizen-centred services' (p.37). The organisational change being attempted was not the same in each case, therefore again there was a unique character to each case study and, moreover, the judgement of 'innovatory' is not defined. Hartley and Allison do state that they interviewed a range of stakeholders including political leaders, senior officers, managers, staff, trade union representatives, community, voluntary and private sector partners. In total they carried out 75 in-depth interviews and held five focus groups with staff. To this they added observations and documentation. They do not mention how long the interviews were or how they were analysed but they visited each organisation for two days to conduct the interviews. The primary data are not reported, only the authors' interpretation, so the thoroughness of the analysis, its accuracy and any bias in the interpretation cannot be evaluated.

Harris, A. & Chapman, C. (2002) *Democratic leadership for school improvement in challenging contexts*. Paper presented to the International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement, Copenhagen.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Harris and Chapman (2002) see the concept of distributed leadership as coterminous with that of democratic leadership, and examine it by reference to the structural arrangements and headteacher actions by which it may be created. For them, the democratic leadership found in their study covers similar terrain to transformational leadership, though the emphasis given to distributing leadership and empowering others suggests an approach that has democratic rather than transformational principles at its core. Transformational and democratic principles are not, however, elaborated and compared. Central to democratic leadership is co-operation and the alignment of others to the values and vision of the leader, and the building of community, but it is not clear if these are findings or conceptual assertions. The conceptualisation of democratic leadership seems to be a descriptive one that is based on the authors' summary of what was found from the headteachers in their study. In this description, democratic leadership includes distributed leadership, the latter consisting of a process of delegating responsibility and authority to senior management teams and then, more widely, giving teachers opportunities to share in decision-making, bringing out the best through these strategies, and giving praise.

These approaches are summed up in the term 'empowerment'. Harris and Chapman seem to be exploring structural ways of creating a cultural change towards a less authoritarian, more democratic approach to leadership. Indeed, they sometimes use the terms democratic and distributed leadership almost interchangeably. Distributed leadership in this formulation is therefore created by one leader – the headteacher – through a process which progressively extends the degree to which individuals and groups within a school have the opportunity to take responsibility for aspects of its work. However, this does not remove the ultimate control function from the headteacher, whose accountability to the school governors and other external agencies, such as the local education authority (LEA) or OFSTED is seen as requiring them to retain the ability to steer the school in a particular direction. In this view, then, distributed leadership becomes more wide-ranging than delegation, but remains bounded within the constraints of the overall policy decisions of head and governors.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Harris and Chapman set out specifically to explore how far leaders in 'schools facing challenging circumstances' (SFCC) shared similar approaches to leadership; and the extent to which the particular demands of the school context shaped or influenced leadership style. Ten improving schools, with successful leadership and selected to reflect a range of contexts and geographical spread, were studied. Multiple methods were used to try to 'capture 'thick descriptions' of leadership practice' (p.3). The basis on which a school is identified as in 'challenging circumstances' is data gathered by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) which define the school's context, such as the number of examination passes at A*–C at GCSE, the number of free school meals and other deprivation indicators. Inspection reports by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) were relied on to provide evidence of successful leadership and 'an upward school improvement trajectory' when selecting the schools for study. It could be argued that studies that relying solely on OFSTED inspection reports to define successful leadership are working on a very limited range of leadership criteria.

The methods of study comprised semi-structured interviews with heads, middle managers and classroom teachers, plus testing of findings with other heads, in addition to collecting a wide range of documentary and contextual data. The data were analysed within-case initially, and then between-case. Over fifty interviews were conducted (the exact number is not given) which amounts to an average of five per school. These were fully transcribed and returned to the interviewees for checking. The exact methods of analysis are not detailed. However, the authors state that their analysis 'led to the emergence of a number of common themes and key findings'

(p. 4). These are what are reported. The authors acknowledge that the amount of generalisation possible from such a small number of cases is limited but suggest that some preliminary findings are possible.

The account frequently refers to 'the heads' but no indication is given of the proportion who gave such a response or performed such actions. This is potentially misleading, as it is presenting the data as representing a consensus which may not exist in all cases. No primary data are reported so it is difficult to say how representative the interpretation is. For example, no insight is given into the degree to which triangulation, especially viewpoints of teachers and middle managers, was used to test critically the themes and findings.

Harris and Chapman conclude from their discussion that effective leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances is defined by an individual value system that embraces equity, empowerment and moral purpose, and is democratic, people-centred and centrally concerned with community building. These headteachers adopted five strategies in pursuit of this:

- A conscious effort to realign staff and pupils to their personal values and vision, by modelling democratic leadership in their behaviour through empowering and encouraging others. They organised this around personal values of fairness, equality, caring, sought to demonstrate that they believed in all children, and aimed to motivate and set high expectations for them.
- Distributed leadership. They delegated responsibility and authority to their senior management teams, and gave teachers opportunities to share in decision-making and were 'empowered to lead'. They brought out the best through these strategies, and by encouraging their staff by giving praise.
- Staff development, which was vigorously promoted so that the school was 'investing in capacity'. This further raised staff morale, and was assisted by encouraging staff to take risks and expecting high standards in return.
- They developed and maintained relationships well. They were seen as fair; showed joy and vibrancy with students; generated commitment; were open, honest, self-critical. They saw the school as part of the community; emphasised people not systems; and held to a 'central set of democratic values' which drives practice. In this they drew on both Stoll and Fink's (1996) concept of invitational leadership and Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence.
- Community building, through discussion and dialogue, which they present as leading to a learning community. It also involves creating 'social trust' between the school and its wider parental body and the local community as a whole. They worked to bring about the interconnection of home, school and community, managed conflict, and knew how to span boundaries between the school and its community.

Thus distributed leadership is presented here as one dimension of a larger model of leadership development. Interestingly, the distribution takes place within limits, although other work from the 'Improving the Quality of Education for All' (IQEA) project (see, for example, Jackson 2000; McGregor 2003) claims that such empowerment creates a staff and student research programme that can challenge existing assumptions. Here, however, Harris and Chapman state that it is important for the headteacher to be 'firm' on values, expectations and standards, 'and occasionally ruthless' (p.10).

Harris and Chapman appear to be making a connection between schools' external and internal contexts and the adoption of democratic leadership. Headteachers adopt leadership approaches

that match the particular stage of a school's development. Although headteachers in the study adopted autocratic approaches at times, they had deliberately chosen a form of leadership to move the school forward that empowered others to lead and distributed leadership activity throughout school. This they refer to as 'democratic leadership' (p.4). Harris and Chapman conclude that such democratic leadership is possible in 'challenging circumstances' and that effective leaders in SFCC are able, within competing values frameworks, to combine a moral purpose with a willingness to be collaborative and to promote collaboration amongst colleagues (p.10). They state that, 'In all cases [the heads] had changed their schools for the better by placing a high premium upon personal values and focusing upon cultural rather than structural change' (p.10).

It is clear that Harris and Chapman are able to draw on considerable amounts of data in their paper. However, it is important that they make a more detailed presentation of those data (which they doubtless have planned) in order to reinforce their claims about the place of what they call distributed leadership in effective school leadership. Although the article is potentially an important one, it is not possible to judge its validity because the data are not reported in sufficient detail.

Spillane, J., Halverson, R. and Diamond, J.B. (2001) Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective. In Educational Researcher, vol. 30, no. 3, pp.23–28

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Harris and Chapman root their discussion of distributed leadership in a traditional organisational theory framework. Their analysis suggests a view of leadership as a series of tasks. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) take a very different approach. In their formulation, 'the execution of leadership tasks is often distributed among multiple leaders' (p.25), but whilst tasks are a key element of leadership analysis, they are not sufficient on their own. Spillane *et al.* argue that distributed leadership is the process of thinking and acting in a particular situation, and that it unfolds on the basis of the perception of individual practitioners and their theories in use (Argyris and Schon 1978). Leadership in school is to be seen as thinking and acting in a given situation so as to facilitate teaching and learning.

The foundations of Spillane *et al.*'s discussion of distributed leadership lie in the concepts of distributed cognition and activity theory (see discussion of Gronn's work above). Distributed cognition is a process of sensemaking that incorporates situation, action and artefacts into a single whole. For example, use of a calculator is not separate from solving a maths problem: it is an integral part of seeking the solution. Cognitive activity becomes 'stretched' across actors and artefacts to make sense of the situation, and it is important to recognise the many-sided nature of any situation. Thus the people, the history, the events, and the physical setting are all part of the situation wherein leadership is exercised. One consequence of this is that leadership can be seen as 'co-enacted', 'stretched over' the actors and artefacts that are incorporated into the process, and, perhaps, located 'between' the interdependent actors. Another is that leadership can be found in both formal positions within an organisation and in informal relationships that rest on particular forms of expertise.

This view of distributed leadership examines how the leadership responsibilities and the actions through which they are exercised are distributed among what Spillane *et al.* call positional and informal leadership. As was implied above, this requires a careful analysis of two things: the task or tasks involved within their location (leadership responsibilities); and the relation between the macro and micro activities and processes involved (the actions through which leadership is exercised). In other words, it involves the study of how it is carried out as well as what it is. From this perspective, school leaders need to be involved in defining the tasks as well as executing

them, and this activity requires the active deployment of individuals' espoused theories and theories in use. Leadership is, then, to be understood as it unfolds from the perspective of practitioners and through their theories in use.

This argument appears to suggest that task-definition must be possible throughout the school by all its members, however junior their formal position may be. However, it should be noted that all the examples cited by the authors seem to relate to the work of school principals, demonstrating how the responsibilities of principals can be shared, so that leadership is not exercised by one person but by several people conjointly. It is, however, not clear if they take the view that empowerment of others emanates from a powerful central leader, which Graetz and Harris and Chapman indicate is the case.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Spillane *et al.* provide us with a qualitative study, from which they draw three small examples to illustrate the overall argument. The study which is giving rise to the sophisticated analysis they put forward is a qualitative study of thirteen elementary schools in Chicago. It is a substantial study, and the project website contains a number of very substantial working papers and conference presentations, but unfortunately they may not be cited. In the article under consideration, it is suggested that 'the execution of leadership tasks is often distributed among multiple leaders' (p.25) and the three examples demonstrate different ways in which this might be found. One looks at the attempts made by one elementary school to use test scores to focus instructional improvement efforts on specific individual student learning needs – a kind of target setting. A key part of this involves analysing and interpreting test results and identifying the instructional needs and priorities from that analysis. This involves three staff, all of whom bring quite different skills and knowledge to the task, and who 'co-enact' the leadership tasks involved, leading to the creation of a professional development programme for the teaching staff to help revise their practice in line with the conclusions the team draws from the analysis. The result is potentially more than any one individual could manage. Spillane *et al.* argue that this indicates that leadership analysis may sometimes be better undertaken at the group rather than the individual level.

A second example involves the principal and language arts co-ordinator meeting individually with each teacher on a termly basis to discuss teachers' instructional plans. Again, the different skills and understandings of the two leaders, one focused on accountability procedures and the other concerned with the teaching area, create a situation in which co-enacted leadership creates an understanding of the task that neither could have achieved alone. The authors argue that this represents interdependent action, and that the resultant leadership is 'in between' the two actors, with the practice of leading being 'stretched over' the work of the two.

In the last example, Spillane *et al.* suggest that leadership practice can be 'stretched over' two or more individuals even when they are working on a task separately yet interdependently. They cite an approach to teacher evaluation in which the friendly and supportive assistant principal visits classrooms frequently, discusses the visit before attending and then follows up on his observation with another discussion. The principal on the other hand, maintains a more distant formal relationship with her staff, and visits classrooms twice a year to make a summative evaluation of the quality of individual teachers' practice. Although they conduct the tasks separately, the two evaluators discuss their findings in detail, so that the principal is able to make her final judgement on much more than the occasional visit. This is described as 'co-constructing a practice of leading instructional change through the evaluation of teaching practice' (p.25).

The central argument that Spillane *et al.* are seeking to support through these examples is that leadership practice has to be analysed in relation to the task and what they call 'the artefacts that

represent in reified form the problem-solving initiatives of previous human action' (pp.25–6). In the examples they give, artefacts might include the test scores, the instructional programmes and plans, and the protocols used for classroom observation. They argue that such materials and structures do not provide the backdrop for leadership action, they are an intrinsic part of it and define components of it. 'The material situation does not 'affect' what school leaders do, it is *constitutive of their practice*.' (italics in original) (p.26). This suggests that distributed leadership must be analysed on a situation by situation or task by task basis. What is not discussed is how the tasks are analysed so that such interdependent action becomes the means through which leadership is exercised.

Kets de Vries, M.F.R. (1999) High-Performance Teams: Lessons from the Pygmies. Organizational Dynamics, Winter 1999, pp.66–77.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Kets de Vries (1999), like Bryant (2003, see below), examines leadership within a non-Western social community. Kets de Vries defines distributed leadership in terms of effective teamworking, which links with social activity theory espoused by Wenger (2000), also discussed below. Kets de Vries conceptualised this in a study of pygmy society, which is informal, egalitarian and recognises no single individual with ultimate authority. Relationships are based on trust, mutual protection and support; there is open communication, strong sharing of common goals, values and beliefs; and members subordinate their own objectives to those of the group. All members of a social group are empowered to make decisions. Respect is based not on age, gender, wealth or status but on expertise and knowledge. If some individuals carry greater weight when a decision is made, it will be because of special relevant ability or skills which they possess. Moreover,

Every member of pygmy society is prepared to challenge authority whenever he or she believes that the team effort is jeopardised. As a result, each team member is likely to accept ownership for the team's decisions (p.74).

These principles are strongly linked to the socio-cultural context, which raises questions about their viability elsewhere.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Kets de Vries (1999) presents an ethnographic case study based on his personal experience of living with a pygmy community in the Cameroon rainforest. It is not formally referenced, and there is no explanation of methodology; we are not even told how long the author spent in the host community. The data must be regarded as seriously lacking robustness.

The author presents a theorised relationship between pygmy community organisation and effective (commercial) teamworking. Examples are given to show how distributed leadership is practised in pygmy communities, through seven practices which model effective teamwork behaviour and make them 'less susceptible than most corporate teams to the processes that corrode group efforts' (p.69). These seven practices are:

- members' respect for and trust in each other
- members' protection of and support for each other
- engagement in open dialogue/communication

- shared, strong common goals
- strong shared values and beliefs
- subordination of members' own objectives to those of the team
- members' subscription to distributed leadership (as outlined by the preceding points)

These hypotheses about teamworking are reasonable but the author points out that the development of pygmy teamworking starts with the early socialisation of children. This raises questions about the extent to which any commercial or educational organisation which recruits adults can socialise them into new practices and ways of working. The author himself identifies this as a major challenge.

Kets de Vries contradicts himself by indicating that 'however participatory one likes to be, there is a need for both direction from the top and clear communication about the organization's priorities' (p.75). Pygmy people negotiate their group's shared objectives; Kets de Vries recognises that commercial organisations have substantial imposed imperatives. He adds that leadership should be authoritative rather than authoritarian but this is still a far cry from his earlier discussions about distributed leadership through trust and teamworking.

Related leadership concepts

This section reviews studies which address leadership concepts relevant to distributed leadership, and which have implications for its understanding, but which do not explicitly address distributed leadership. As for the previous section, discussion of the studies is ordered according to a notional continuum of source of initiative for distributed leadership, starting with those which give more emphasis to distributed leadership as emerging from top-down initiatives.

The authors of the studies and the main leadership concept they address are:

- Campbell, C., Gold, A. and Lunt, I – strong leadership for empowerment
- Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper – empowering leadership
- Gold, A., Evans, J., Earley, P., Halpin, D and Collarbone, P. Gold *et al.* – 'development of leadership capacity'
- Blase and Blasé – shared governance
- Portin – devolved leadership
- Bryant – decentralised leadership
- Leithwood and Jantzi – teacher leadership
- Silva, Gimbert and Nolan – teacher leadership
- Abzug and Phelps – professional partnership model
- Wenger – communities of practice
- Knight and Trowler – communities of practice

- Mahony and Moos – democratic leadership
- Starratt – democratic leadership
- Allix – transformational leadership

Campbell, C., Gold, A. and Lunt, I. (no date), 'A Passion for the Job: Conversations with headteachers about their values'. Unpublished manuscript.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Willingness to distribute power is an issue in itself. The principals in a study reported by Campbell *et al.* (no date) were not keen to give away their control.

Whilst all the headteachers talk of empowering others, developing others and sharing leadership, it is clear that they maintain a clear overview. (p.11)

They quote one headteacher interviewee:

It is that business of actually people feeling that they are involved and are consulted and are being empowered and given responsibility and at the same time, feeling that you are in control and managing it so that they are able to do it. (p.10)

This was perhaps a more benevolent attitude than others that were expressed by the six headteachers they interviewed in their research to explore how headteachers articulated their values about educational leadership. Neither the term 'distributed leadership' nor others closely associated were mentioned. However, the view of the headteacher as providing the overview, less blunt but similar to the Harris and Chapman statement that the heads were prepared to be 'firm and sometimes ruthless' (p.10), can also be interpreted as being about a right to exercise ultimate leadership power which is justified by possession of particular expertise and knowledge.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Campbell *et al.* were not as rigorous in the setting up of their six cases as either Gold *et al.* (2002) or Harris and Chapman (2002). They did not attempt to triangulate the opinions of the six headteachers they interviewed. The headteachers were not selected for any particular reason other than they agreed to participate in the research when they were contacted and could provide the time when required. They were all from schools in inner city areas though there was a gender split.

A broad interview schedule was used and is provided for scrutiny. The interviews were taped and transcripts prepared and analysed using the framework which had informed the drawing up of the interview schedule. This framework is not offered for scrutiny. Campbell *et al.* do not attempt to draw theory out of the six interviews but note how the data 'illustrate the current literature' (p.5). They use primary data throughout the paper as illustrations of points and to provide support. In all cases these are accompanied by a distinguishing pseudonym so that the examples can be seen to come from a balance of the interviewees. Because they are not attempting to prove a theory or develop one, the numbers adopting a particular perspective are not as important.

Bryant M. (2003) Cross-cultural perspectives on school leadership: lessons from Native American Interviews. In Bennett, N., Crawford, M and Cartwright, M. (eds.) Effective Educational Leadership. pp.216–228

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Like Kets de Vries (1999), discussed earlier, Bryant examines a non-Western social community, though from a different continent and culture. In his study of how leadership is perceived and understood among a number of Native American tribes, Bryant examines the idea that leadership is not exercised by one person but by all members of the tribe conjointly. There are links to the social activity theory of Wenger (2000), discussed below.

One of the six dimensions identified in Bryant's analysis is 'decentralised leadership'. This describes a perception that leadership is not located in a person but in a community, and 'the leader' is a transient position. Everyone plays a leadership role at different times, and can make a significant contribution. Authority is specific to a particular situation, and ends when the need for it ends. An individual 'grows' into a position of leadership; they are not appointed to it. There is no superordinate authority or hierarchy: accountability is to the community as a whole, not to individuals or agents of the community. Bryant follows other students of Native American culture using the analogy of flocks of birds in flight: no one bird is 'leader': they change places as they fly, yet all seem to understand and fly as one. Decentralised leadership in this cultural context is a communitarian phenomenon. Individual leadership roles are derived from the community and acknowledged only for as long as they are seen as relevant and necessary.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Bryant is very cautious about his data and what can be derived from them. His analysis is described as 'preliminary', and he expresses concern about both the extent to which the data are generalisable and how far it is possible to apply conventional white American standards of data analysis to information gathered from people who do not presume to speak for others. He comments that analysis and interpretation is exactly that action. Nevertheless, with that caveat he is also very clear about the nature of the data, which are derived from extended interviews with twelve Native Americans from six different tribes. The work was carried out by Bryant himself and a graduate class. All the interviews were conducted by several class members, so that full accounts could be generated – tape recording and note taking was unacceptable to several of the tribes. In addition, they participated in some ritual preparations for a major event, and were able to talk extensively to the members of the tribe they worked with. From this analysis, he identifies six key themes, one of which is decentralised leadership. Extensive references are made to the interviews, for although exact quotation is sometimes difficult, their use of several interviewers made possible fairly precise recollection of what was said, and the reports were verified by the interviewees.

Kets de Vries recognises that leadership practices embedded in the pygmy community and learned from birth may not be transferable to adults joining commercial or educational organisations. This might apply equally to Bryant's study. How leadership is understood and practised appears to be strongly linked to the cultural context of the study, and this inevitably raises questions about the applicability of their data in other social settings.

Two further points are worth making about the two studies by Bryant and Kets de Vries. The first is alluded to by Bryant: the problems inherent in interpreting data from one culture in the context of another. At a micro level this is the argument often put forward against the managerialist emphasis in public policy that is drawn from the commercial sector. The second is implicit in both studies but should be drawn out. Both are examining decision-making processes in a culture as a

whole rather than in one small organisational element within it. The values that underpin these discussions of distributed or decentralised leadership are macro-cultural rather than micro-cultural organisational or individual values. The extent to which such distributed leadership can be achieved within schools that are located in a more directive, hierarchical society, wherein even the democratic principle is one of a representation rather than direct participation, must be given consideration.

Gold, A., Evans, J., Earley, P., Halpin, D. and Collarbone, P. (2002), 'Principled Principals? Values-driven leadership: evidence from ten case studies of 'outstanding' school leaders', Paper presented to the AERA annual meeting, New Orleans, April.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The case studies of ten 'successful' schools by Gold *et al.* (2002) explored theoretically and empirically aspects of the 'moral art' of educational leadership. They do not use the term distributed leadership, referring instead to 'development of leadership capacity'. This appears to be very similar in that it involves delegating power and responsibilities to faculty and departmental heads and involving them in working parties and initiatives. It is viewed as a professional development exercise rather than a distinct method for leading the school.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The paper is based on empirical data which were collected for a larger study (Earley *et al.* 2002) of which this paper is but one output. The ten case studies were completed alongside a larger scale survey which was addressing a number of themes. They were chosen to be in contrasting locations 'on the basis of recent OfSTED inspection reports in which the schools' leadership and management were highly rated' (p.4). This is but one limited view of leadership and management as pointed out earlier.

The case studies were not ethnographies and there was no detailed observational work completed during the average two day visits. Key informants were interviewed including the headteacher, chair of governors, members of the senior management team, middle managers and classroom teachers. However no numbers are given for the total number of interviews or the number in each school. Additional information was taken from documentary sources such as school inspection reports and action plans, development and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, governors' reports to parents but observations of leadership team meetings were only made 'when possible' (p.4). In a similarly opportunistic way the views of pupils were elicited 'informally'.

The data are reported under conceptual headings but no mention is made of how they were analysed. There are references to primary data, quotes and descriptions of incidents but it is difficult to say how representative these are because the full scope of the data is not given.

Keyes, M.W., Hanley-Maxwell, C. and Capper, C.A. (1999) 'Spirituality? It's the Core of my Leadership': Empowering Leadership in an Inclusive Elementary School. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35 (2): 203–237

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Keyes *et al.* highlight how a certain type of strong leadership can be empowering. Their study investigates a case in which others are empowered through the vision and action of the leader (the principal of an elementary school). It uses and extends Reitzug's (1994) Developmental Taxonomy of Empowering Principal Behaviour. This taxonomy comprises *support* (creating a

supportive environment for critique); *facilitation* (how the principal stimulates critique); and *possibility* (how the principal makes voice possible by actualising products of critique). The latter seems to refer to how opportunities are given (eg through making resources available) to turn 'voice' into practical action. 'Possibility' would seem akin to 'decision control' as defined in Phillips (2002: see below). Keyes *et al.* suggest that Reitzug's 'framework was missing an element discovered in this study, spirituality' (p.215): spirituality is added as the 'core' to the framework, which 'grounds, supports, and defines the critical actions of support, facilitation, and possibility in building an inclusive community' (p.215). This concept is intended capture behaviours mentioned in the data gathered. It is described as ethical, caring, humble, patient and loving and refers to the principal's capacity 'to center her decisions on issues of personal dignity and individual value' (p.222). The principal's spirituality is reflected in six fundamental beliefs which are threads which extend Reitzug's work. Hence Keyes *et al.* propose a new leadership framework to define and support inclusive practices.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The primary focus of the study by Keyes *et al.* is about improving schooling, but its prime concern is not student grades. Rather the study is about inclusion and creating the right environment and opportunities for all the children. Empowering leadership, as described in the study, is claimed to be effective in achieving this.

The study aimed to describe and define the role of administrative leadership within an inclusive elementary school, and to build on existing leadership theory to develop new theory to describe leadership within inclusive schools. It is described as a critical ethnographic study of one elementary school in which the main focus of the study was the principal. The research involved (to varying degrees) teachers, teaching assistants, parents, children, principal and district-level administrators, and data collection through interviews, observations, and examination of archives. Limitations of the study are appropriately acknowledged. Findings and concepts are fairly well linked to data and so quite robust generally. Some further clarification and elaboration of some concepts (eg belief in dreams) would be helpful.

The study concluded that the principal's behaviours in support of inclusive schooling reflected Reitzug's framework of empowering leadership, namely support, facilitation and possibility (defined above). In addition, spirituality emerged from the data as a core belief which supported her behaviours. Keyes *et al.* also highlight that not all ideas were open to critique – i.e. the goal of inclusive schooling was not open to question (p.228, 233). They draw attention to the absence in Reitzug's original study of enquiry into the effect on student experience, or into unequal power. In Keyes *et al.*'s framework, equity and justice for students with disabilities is a built-in goal, and so captures an emancipatory perspective in leadership by the principal who develops a democratic, responsive educational community. Keyes *et al.* conclude from their data that Reitzug's framework of empowering leadership needs to be extended to include a notion of spirituality which 'grounds, supports, and defines the critical actions of support, facilitation, and possibility in building an inclusive community'.

Reitzug's framework of empowering leadership, and the testing and expansion of this in the study, articulates concepts of leadership activity that could be helpful in characterising aspects of distributed leadership. Keyes *et al.* link leadership, relationships within the school with teaching and learning (in the wider sense). As a result their study explores some of the dynamics of distributed leadership as a part of an *educational* community with *educational* implications that are not encompassed solely by measurable, quantitative outcomes.

Blase, J. and Blase, J. (1999), 'Implementation of shared governance for instructional improvement: principals' perspectives', in *Journal of Educational Administration*, vol. 37, no. 5, pp.476–500.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Blase and Blase set out to describe the practices, thoughts and feelings of shared governance principals as they confronted the challenges of school restructuring. They completed a qualitative study of the principals of nine schools by open-ended interview using grounded theory inquiry method. They claim to be able to offer 'new empirically-grounded knowledge, both descriptive and conceptual, about shared governance' (p.477). Shared governance has as a central aspect '... substantial teacher involvement in school-wide decision making.' There is no doubt that, within the research context, leadership was distributed, but reliance on consensual decision-making and the setting up of task groups as required does not make it part of the formal organisational structure.

Blase and Blase's analysis is substantially at odds with much of the work on distributed leadership outlined here. Although they do not use the term 'distributed leadership', they argue that all forms of shared governance and decision making can easily become another, more subtle control device for leaders to use with their staff. In particular, they imply that the culture and vision-creating activities outlined by Harris and Chapman stand at odds with the kinds of shared governance that they favour.

All the principals in the study reported that '... teachers' participation in shared governance tended to evolve from a consultative role to a decision-making role' (p.482). Blase and Blase found that all the successful shared-governance principals they studied had gone through a process of 'backing off' or 'letting go' of power as part of their building an inclusive school community. This had involved the principals in:

- extracting themselves from decision-making processes to a great extent
- avoiding monitoring teachers and contradicting their decisions
- encouraging teachers to participate voluntarily in committee and task-force work
- encouraging election of executive council members (rather than personally appoint members)
- encouraging teachers to represent the school at regional meetings of shared-governance schools
- encouraging openness to risk and experimentation, and
- reconciling within themselves the inevitable perception of some that a leader who backs off is weak

They found that five primary strategies were required for implementing shared governance. There had to be the building of trust, developing open communication, sharing information, building consensus, and embracing inevitable conflict. However, Blase and Blase warn in their conclusion that:

... giving decision-making discretion to a 'select' group of teachers can become merely another form of administrative control. By creating the illusion of teachers' decision

making, control may become invisible. ... 'Collaborative decision making' may become a new form of domination more insidious than that found in traditionally run schools. (p.494)

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Blase and Blase explain their approach to their research in some detail. They used an 'open-ended interview format' (p.478) based on one general question. Selection of the principals involved was 'based on a review of annual reports collected by the League of Professional Schools; on-site visitation reports; and referrals by university faculty, facilitators and the League of Professional Schools' associate director' (p.478). Background information is provided on the League of Professional Schools.

The development process of the protocol of open-ended questions that were used is described briefly and the piloting that was undertaken. The final protocol is provided. The selection criteria for the nine principals are explicitly described and breakdown of the sample is given. The interviews were conducted in the schools and were audio-taped, transcribed, and checked. They state that the data were collected 'in accordance with symbolic interaction theory' (p.480) the implications of which they briefly describe.

In the same way they specify the guiding principles for their data analysis which was grounded theory and constant comparative analysis. They describe the process in some detail. Throughout their report they use words such as 'all', 'some', 'most' and 'several' to indicate the relative proportions of principals subscribing to that opinion or action. There were, however, a number of occasions when they simply used 'principals' with no indication as to whether it was all or some. They use actual quotes to illustrate points made but these are not assigned so it is not possible to tell if there is a range of principals words used. However, despite these caveats the data appear reasonably robust.

Portin, B.S. (1998) Compounding roles: a study of Washington's principals. International Journal of Educational Research, 29 (4) pp.381–391

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Portin reports on a study undertaken in Washington state, USA. He refers to 'devolved leadership', conceived in terms of site-based management, i.e. greater devolution of responsibility from the state to the individual schools, roughly equivalent to Local Management of Schools (LMS) in England and Wales. Portin makes very limited reference to devolution of leadership within schools; in fact, he recommends that there should be further research into 'new models of leadership which empower principals *and others in the schools* toward new roles re-conceived beyond simply doing more' (p.345, emphasis added).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Portin researched views of senior managers (principals and vice-principals) about the impact of recent reforms in education in Washington state. He supplies a reasonable amount of information about methodology, which had two parts – focus group discussions with principals to identify key themes, followed by questionnaires to 'virtually all' principals and vice principals in the State. The latter achieved a 34.6% response rate. Data actually used for this article were drawn from the 687 questionnaires returned by principals with more than five years' experience. Questions required response on a Likert scale. Results were summarised. One way analysis of variance was applied to identify any significant variances among the various categories (schools by type, location etc) of respondents. If this test was significant, the Scheffé post-hoc multiple comparison test was used to identify the specific differences. Data thus appear to have been scrutinised rigorously,

and therefore it is reasonable to assume the evidence about the impact of site-based management in Washington State is valid and reliable.

Portin cautions that his research findings are local to the State, but given the similarity of legislation in England, for example about truancy and exclusions, it is possible that the findings might apply here and, indeed anywhere else where site-based management and other legislation has been carried through or is planned. It adds to other studies for example from Australia and the UK. However, if we are looking at distributed leadership *within* educational institutions, this study is only of limited relevance, because Portin uses the term 'devolved leadership' specifically to mean site-based management, ie devolution of responsibility from the State to the individual schools, which approximates to LMS in England and Wales.

Portin found that '... principals are simply waiting for recognition that the challenges they face are complex, the answers to educational reform and student need are diverse, and all of it takes enormous amounts of time and energy' (p.345). Increased devolution of decision making to schools has led to widespread use of site councils, particularly in urban schools, which has increased the involvement of staff and parents. The reported impact was stated to have been beneficial but working with site councils 'has consumed a disproportionate amount of administrative time' (p.339). Mediation of conflict between and among students, parents and school staff is also taking significant additional amounts of time. Truancy legislation has not significantly improved principals' capacity to address the problem of truancy. Site-based management has led to major expansion across external boundaries, including establishing partnerships with business, though more for urban schools than for those in rural areas.

Responses to questions about the benefits of delegated decision-making were mixed. The greater complexity of tasks, and the increasing number of tasks enforced by additional legislation (eg to deal with truancy) with no corresponding reductions elsewhere, are leading to overload. Principals report being thwarted from the core work they feel so important to the effectiveness of their school, namely, instructional leadership (p.345).

Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2000) The relative effects of principal and teacher sources of leadership on student engagement with school. Educational Administration Quarterly, vol. 35, pp.679–706

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Leithwood and Jantzi seek to accommodate the argument of Spillane *et al.* (see above) in their conceptualisation of leadership. Although they are not concerned with distributed leadership *per se*, their study is concerned to identify empirically the degree to which 'teacher leadership' can be regarded as effective. They compare the impact on school achievement of more formally constituted leaders (principals) and less formally constituted forms (teacher leadership). As other articles reviewed here indicate, however, the term 'teacher leadership' is as ill-defined as is 'distributed leadership'. To accommodate this, Leithwood and Jantzi suggest that leadership can be seen as the exercise of influence: as socially constructed, rather than structurally defined on the basis of one's formal position in the organisation. All that is needed for its existence is for it to be recognised by others. Leadership is exercised when someone is recognised as a leader by others who consent to be led. They refer to Hallinger and Heck (1998) who argue that leadership is located in organisational roles and the network of relations between them.

In this formulation, leadership is not derived from formal decisions at a senior level in the organisation intended to facilitate wider distribution of leadership tasks. Instead it is derived from the 'bottom' of the hierarchy, where individuals choose to acknowledge as legitimate someone's attempt to lead. As Grint (2000) suggests in his more general work on leadership, the reason why

leaders are able to get things done is not because of the quality of their leadership but because those they aspire to lead allow them to do so. This analysis indicates a strong possibility that leadership is *de facto* dispersed, even if it is not distributed in the sense of Gronn's concertive, conjoint leadership.

The discussion in this paper has potential relevance to our review in three ways. First, their conceptualisation of leadership as the process of successfully influencing others on the basis that they are willing to accept that influence provides an overarching definition within which definitions of distributed leadership can sit. Secondly, their understanding of principal leadership is that it can take a number of forms, which they describe as instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial and contingent. Each has a different focus, key assumptions, and locus of leadership. Thirdly, their understanding of teacher leadership is broad enough to cover both formal teacher leadership through roles such as departmental chair or lead teacher (in England, heads of department/subject leaders or advanced skills teachers) and informal contact between colleagues. The former may involve representative, professional development, or advocacy roles, whilst the latter is likely to involve sharing ideas, volunteering for new projects and bringing new ideas into the school.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Leithwood and Jantzi present a statistical analysis of leadership practice across a large Canadian school district, drawing on a survey of 1818 teachers and 6490 students. Their concern is to assess the relative effectiveness of principal and teacher leadership.

Working on the basis of a previous factor analysis (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999), they identify a number of school and classroom-level conditions that mediate the influence of all sources and forms of school leadership on students. Three of the school level conditions are drawn from the four key variables put forward by Hallinger and Heck (1998): purposes and goals, organisational culture, and structure and organisation. On the basis of their own prior work they distinguish school planning from purposes and goals as a distinct variable. In addition to these four variables, Leithwood and Jantzi postulate a fifth: information collection and decision making. They further identify two classroom-level conditions, the development of which they state is a new dimension that extends the previous work by Hallinger and Heck. The first they call 'instructional services', which are defined as interventions by teachers with students aimed at stimulating their educational growth, and include activities such as instructional planning, clarification of learning goals, decisions about curriculum content and selection of instructional strategies. The second is named 'policies and procedures', which relate to student-focused or related activities such as encouraging teacher professional development, and encouraging the allocation of resources to classrooms without stifling individual initiatives.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the two broad strategies of principal and teacher leadership, Leithwood and Jantzi use as the dependent measure of effective schooling what they call 'student engagement with school'. This goes beyond academic performance to examine both behavioural and affective dimensions, which they call 'student participation' and 'student engagement'. Student participation is defined as the extent to which students participate in school activities both within and outside the classroom. Student identification represents the extent to which students themselves state that they identify with the school and feel they belong to it. Finally, they postulate that family educational culture is a moderating variable that directly influences student engagement, principal leadership and school conditions, and explain why they have identified this as the moderating external variable rather than the more traditional measure of socio-economic status.

After this detailed explication of the variables they employed in constructing the survey instruments and factors to use in the analysis, Leithwood and Jantzi outline the methods they employed, describing the context of the school district where the study was conducted, the instruments developed and the sample of teachers and students surveyed, which drew on the 98 elementary schools in the district. Teachers were asked about the school and classroom variables, and the sources of leadership they identified, whilst students were asked for their perceptions of their engagement with school and of their family educational culture. Data were aggregated to the school level and analysed using SPSS to calculate means, standard deviations and reliability coefficients, and LISREL was used to assess the direct and indirect effects of principal and teacher leadership on student engagement.

The key findings produced from this study are that family educational culture had the strongest relationship with both dimensions of student engagement. School conditions had a significant effect on student identification but no significant effect on student participation. Principal leadership had weak but significant indirect effects on student identification but not participation, whereas teacher leadership had no significant effects on either measure.

In the final section of the paper, Leithwood and Jantzi combine the results of their earlier study (Leithwood and Jantzi 1999) and this replicatory study. They find that the two studies produce broadly similar results:

- Family educational culture is by far the most important factor affecting student engagement.
- Increases in student identification with school were strongly associated with increases in student participation.
- Organisational conditions had a significant direct effect on student engagement, and the second study suggests that school rather than classroom conditions are the more important.
- Principal leadership appears to have greater effects on student involvement than teacher leadership, and weak but significant effects on both measures of student engagement.
- Principal and teacher leadership had significant influences on school but not classroom conditions.

Leithwood and Jantzi suggest that two interpretations of these data are possible. The first is 'the romance of leadership', which suggests, after Meindl (1995), that leadership is 'a convenient, phenomenologically legitimate, social construction which, nonetheless, masks a complex, multi-sourced bundle of influences on organizational outcomes'. However, they incline towards a more favourable interpretation, that although the total effects of principal leadership are small, they have significant effects on the particular school conditions, which are both the aspects of school most amenable to leadership influence and the school-related aspects of the study most significantly related to student engagement. They propose that 'knowing the relative explanatory power of a variable will be at least as interesting as knowing the total amount of variation it explains' (p.429).

Leithwood and Jantzi then explore the implications of this argument for discussions of teacher leadership, pointing out that if the impact of principal leadership is weak, that of teacher leadership is even weaker. They argue that the advocates of teacher leadership have produced little evidence for their claims about its effectiveness, and suggest that, whatever the degree of importance of principal leadership in the change process (Heller and Firestone 1995), teacher

leadership is even less important, at least in relation to change efforts aimed at increasing student engagement.

In their final paragraphs they make two important statements. The first concerns the possible implications of their research for work on school reform, and the second puts forward a proposition about the life cycle of educational initiatives. They suggest that successful school reform is not achieved through what they call a 'silver bullet', but involves 'orchestrating a complex set of variables, including leadership, in the service of a coherent but multi dimensional strategy for organizational learning and systemic change' (p.429).

The sophisticated research design and use of appropriate statistics makes it possible to argue that the data are robust and valid. Further, as a replicatory study it provides important and too-often absent data, which the authors declare might provide a starting point for more outcomes-focused studies of teacher leadership than have hitherto been undertaken. But they also acknowledge that such apparently objective data can be interpreted in more than one way, and they prefer to carry out their interpretation in terms that support their previous work in the area of leadership.

Silva, D.Y., Gimbert, B, and Nolan, J. (2000) Sliding the doors: locking and unlocking possibilities for teacher leadership. Teachers' College Record, vol. 102, no. 4, pp.779–804

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Silva, Gimbert and Nolan see the purpose of school leadership as being to facilitate teaching and learning, and identify a three-fold development of teacher leadership in the context of the United States educational system. The first phase was the development of departmental chairs or heads of subject departments, which created an administrative role for teachers within a hierarchical accountability framework. The second was to draw teachers into the business of preparing curriculum guides and programmes for use in school districts or states. This they interpret as incorporating teachers into the creation of pre-packaged curriculum materials for their colleagues to use, which would create a stronger accountability relationship between teacher and district. Silva *et al.* claim that promoting teacher participants in curriculum design activities was intended to de-skill their colleagues.

Their study then examines in detail three teachers whose work is interpreted as a third phase of development. This is seen as an extension of classroom work, in the shape of activities that seek to represent what are seen as the needs and interests of teachers in the classroom in bringing about innovations that stand at odds with formal school policies and official practice, or are not incorporated into officially declared current school priorities. This kind of leadership is seen as bottom-up, collegial, anti-hierarchical and enabling. Its intention is to reculture bureaucratic schools to create space for meaningful participation by individual teachers in the work of creating policy and legitimating practice in the school. In its emphasis on bottom-up leadership, it has some similarities with the analysis of distributed leadership put forward by Spillane *et al.* It contrasts with the more structurally-based, top-down view proposed by Harris and Chapman, but is readily incorporated into the more general definition of leadership put forward by Leithwood and Jantzi. However, Silva *et al.* pay relatively little attention to the relational system through which leaders may influence others.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Silva *et al.* are concerned with the difficulties in achieving teacher leadership in hierarchical school structures. Their argument rests on three detailed descriptive case studies. Each is located in a different school, and looks at an individual teacher there, who was chosen for the

study on the basis of a judgement by the school district that they were outstanding practitioners. Each case study focuses on attempts by the teacher to bring about some sort of change to school policy or practice: an attempt to influence the development of a new discipline policy for the school without offending the school principal; dealing with high levels of departmentalisation when working in an officially sanctioned inter-disciplinary team that was interested in creating an integrated programme; attempting to respond actively to an official district policy of encouraging all teachers to pursue professional growth but finding that too much questioning of practice caused resistance. In each case, the basis of their attempted leadership is stated to be their long experience of classroom teaching and high perceived knowledge and competence.

The problems they encounter appear to be both structural and cultural: a school in which 'administration' is entirely separate from 'teaching' and has responsibility for policy formation, a strong departmental culture (which is seen as deriving from the school culture rather than from the teachers who chair the departments), and a district culture that allows teacher professional development within predefined limits. Leadership, especially a 'bottom up' teacher leadership, is interpreted as being concerned with changing the status quo.

They conclude by arguing that 'teacher leaders' need five particular skills, which they list as:

- navigating the structure of schools
- nurturing relationships
- modelling professional growth
- helping others with change, and
- challenging the status quo by raising children's voices (although there is very little evidence cited to demonstrate this)

This list of skills is very similar to most contemporary mainstream analyses of leadership practice. With only slight alterations they could be mapped on to the NCSL standards for subject leaders. The central difference between their argument and that of mainstream leadership theorists appears to be that teacher leadership has to be enacted in opposition to the work of formally appointed leaders, which reinforces the earlier point about the ideological nature of some alternative analyses.

Abzug, R. and Phelps, S. (1998) Everything old is new again: Barnard's legacy – lessons for participative leaders. Journal of Management Development, vol. 17, no. 3, pp.207–218.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The conceptual analysis of leadership in contemporary business organisations by Abzug and Phelps focuses on the organisational structure that is appropriate for less centrally-directed, control-oriented, hierarchically organised leadership. Claiming to draw on the seminal analysis of leadership by Barnard (1938), and with reference to Drucker (1989), they argue that hierarchy and tight control are no longer appropriate models for organisations or for leadership within organisations. Instead, the 'mission driven organization' need not 'force-align' or fit the divergent goals of individual workers into a tight framework. The model for this, they suggest, is one of partnership of the kind used by professionals such as lawyers, accountants, or architects to organise their work. In such models, participatory management is the norm, but exists as a means of creating the opportunities for individuals to pursue their own work to promote the profitability and reputation of the partnership as a whole. The basis of such organisations is trust rather than regulation, and leadership is exercised on the basis of status provided by the

possession of what the authors call 'esoteric knowledge'. Such esoteric knowledge also provides the basis upon which individuals can receive 'true responsibility' for the conduct of their work – be it everyday activity or the 'broad sweep of strategic planning' because everyone can feel confident that all share in the vision for the organisation. This has links to the social cultures depicted in the studies by Bryant and Kets de Vries, discussed earlier.

Abzug and Phelps bring us back to the idea of leadership as being created through the structure of the organisation that underpins Harris and Chapman, albeit with different results. For Abzug and Phelps, the consequence of structural change from hierarchy to partnership is accountability to a shared vision or mission for the organisation, within which considerable freedom to act rests on interpersonal trust and the primacy of esoteric knowledge as the basis of leadership. In this sense it reflects the situation-specific analyses of Spillane *et al.* and of Bickmore (see below). Harris and Chapman acknowledge the idea of task-focused leadership and the potential primacy of teams, but the formal accountability of headteacher to governors, and through them to outside organisations, leads them to keep it within a hierarchical context: the headteacher does not 'let go', despite becoming committed to a wider range of individuals being 'empowered' to exercise leadership. They suggest that effective headteachers have to be prepared to be 'firm' and sometimes 'ruthless' – distribution with strings, perhaps?

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

This is a conceptual study, which attempts to draw on previous writings on leadership in developing an alternative understanding of the concept. No empirical data are presented.

Wenger, E. (2000) *Communities of practice and social learning systems*. *Organization*, 7 (2) pp.225–246

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Wenger (2000, p. 228) does not mention distributed leadership *per se* but by implication describes a way in which it may work. He identifies three ways of working within what he calls a community of practice: *engagement* (doing things together, including helping/supporting each other); *imagination* (creating images of our community, including reflection on potential improvement); and *alignment* ('a mutual process of co-ordinating perspectives, interpretations and actions so they realize higher goals' (p.228). Wenger subscribes to social activity theory and conceptualises communities of practice as social learning organisations which possess two components: competence established over time i.e. 'what it takes to act and be recognized as a competent member' (p.227) and ongoing experience of the world as a member of the community. One learns to belong to the community through social learning i.e. by working in it alongside competent members.

Wenger is talking about commercial communities but the concept appears to fit well with teaching, particularly current approaches to induction, mentoring, advanced skills teaching etc, and with Gold *et al.*'s (2002) perceptions of subject leaders as 'experts'. Communities of practice 'depend on internal leadership' (p.231). Wenger describes the role of 'community co-ordinator' (*ibid*) as a leader of sorts, but adds that the community needs 'multiple forms of leadership: thought leaders, networkers, people who document the practice, pioneers etc' (*ibid*). He indicates that such forms of leadership may be concentrated in one or two individuals or widely distributed. Those responsible for leading various activities will change over time, as will the jobs they do. This is congruent with Karkkainen's (2000) view of teams as network builders and knotworkers (see below).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Wenger's is principally a conceptual study and not drawn from particular studies. No empirical data are presented to support the argument put forward in this article.

Knight, P.T. & Trowler, P. R. (2001) Departmental Leadership in Higher Education. Buckingham: SRHE/Open University.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Knight and Trowler support to some extent the social activity theories of Wenger and Engestrom, linking them to Vygotsky's theories of learning and social engagement with the world as presented by Wertsch (1985). However, they suggest that the concept of communities of practice can be problematic, in particular because the boundaries can be hard to draw. They point out that educational organisations are likely to have many layers of communities, and that these are not necessarily mutually supportive. However, Wenger suggests that the conflicts that can arise between communities of practice are usually resolved by each community reviewing its internal practices and expectations of others, whilst taking account of the power relations that exist between them. The extent to which one community of practice can control the activities of another – for example, by imposing technical practices through the introduction of a new computer system – will be a key element that shapes the outcomes of those internal practices.

Knight and Trowler recommend collegiality – the sharing of thinking as well as of tasks – and co-operation as good practice. The absence of these is identified by the authors themselves and the practitioners they interviewed as significant hindrances to effective working within a department. This fits with some of the successful leadership strategies identified by headteacher respondents to Earley *et al.* (2002), which included 'taking your staff with you' (p.35) and 'involving people in decision-making' (p.36). Middle managers in the same survey included team building and advising/supporting colleagues (*ibid*).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Knight and Trowler do not draw directly on empirical data collected specifically for this work, but have referenced a wide range of sources including their own previous research into the experiences of new academics (Knight & Trowler, 1999; Trowler & Knight, 1999), empirical data published by others, and web and e-mail interaction with academic leaders across the English-speaking world, informal but focused specifically for this book. Some of the ideas they have drawn from this are summarised below but because the information is second-hand it is laid out in the original publications.

Discussing dispersed leadership, Knight and Trowler found that many writers were referring to leaders conceived as 'first among equals', with a focus on teams, where either power is dispersed or where team members are liberated so their abilities can be fully utilised (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). Members of such teams will hold each other mutually accountable. Referring specifically to change, they affirm Ramsden's (1998) suggestion that distributed leadership is essential if the different interests, interpretations and identities of all those involved are to be fully utilised. Knight and Trowler also reference a number of examples of research into social practice theory (including the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Engestrom (1999)).

Considering the exercise of leadership at departmental level, Knight and Trowler draw on Turner and Bolam (1998) and suggest that middle leaders (in both schools and universities) require:

- control knowledge (self knowledge, including metacognitive knowledge)
- knowledge of people
- knowledge of educational practice
- conceptual knowledge (concepts and research about leading and managing)
- process knowledge (knowing the processes of leading and managing)
- situational knowledge (understanding the institutional context)
- tacit knowledge that integrates the other six in expert practice

They suggest that training in leadership skills might usefully begin much earlier in a teacher/lecturer's career than it usually does at present.

Mahony, P. & Moos, L. (1998) Democracy and school leadership in England and Denmark. British Journal of Educational Studies, 46, 3, pp.302–317

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Mahony and Moos (1998) support notions of collegiality and co-operation as part of democratic leadership, contrasting these sharply with the NPQH model which existed at the time they were writing.

They indicate that in Danish schools distributed leadership means that all Danish teachers are perceived as professionals. Class teachers are the normal point of contact between schools and parents. Heads must be, first and foremost, good teachers themselves who 'promote dialogue about good professional practice' (p.312) and have 'good pedagogical insight' (ibid). English schools are more hierarchical structures, though parents, teachers and pupils in both countries also valued good communication with heads as a feature of good school leadership. Implicitly, Mahony and Moos are suggesting that the Danes have got things right and that the headteacher behaviour which best enables teachers is exercised as *primus inter pares*. These authors were exploring democratic leadership, but this finding links to other research exploring distributed leadership identified by Knight and Trowler (see, for example, Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Mahony and Moos (1998) drew on a wider survey about leadership as perceived by headteachers, teachers, parents, school governors and pupils in schools in Denmark, England and Scotland. The purpose of this article was to examine the ways that 'concepts and associated activities of leadership are shaped by the political contexts in which they are embedded' (p.302). 'A variety of research methods' (p.302) were used in the original project, to elicit the views of 34 headteachers, 332 teachers, 630 parents, 132 school governors and 1088 pupils in schools in Denmark, England and Scotland. Interviews and card sort exercises are mentioned, but full details of methodology are not given in the article; readers are referred to MacBeath (1998) for full information.

Given the limited amount of data presented, it is not possible to make a secure judgement about validity, though there is no apparent mismatch. However, by taking legislation from the Teacher

Training Agency (TTA) as the main frame of reference, the authors may be making a narrow judgement about the intentions behind policy in the UK in terms of pupils' holistic education. Arguably the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and subsequent legislation does include education beyond the merely academic.

Starratt, R. J. (2001) Democratic leadership theory in late modernity: an oxymoron or ironic possibility? International Journal of Leadership in Education, 4 (4): 333–352

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Starratt's piece is a theoretical exploration of democratic leadership. He contrasts a narrow concept of democratic theory ('representative government', p.335) with a 'more communal, fraternal, collaborative expression of democracy' (p.336). In this latter conception, democratic educational leadership 'should be focused on cultivating school environments where [a] richer and fuller humanity is experienced and activated by people acting in communion' (p.338). Important in this are a pragmatic approach, moral wariness, acceptance of limited rationality, the teaching of rudiments of democratic living, and 'permeating all of it, a belief that the moral fulfilment of working towards a democratic community is worth the struggle for its imperfect realization' (p.351).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Starratt does not undertake any empirical work in his article, engaging instead in scholarly reflection on the work of others. In this he is reliant on their own accurate interpretations of their data because he does not return to any primary data.

Allix, N.M. (2000), 'Transformational Leadership: Democratic or Despotic?', in Educational Management and Administration, vol. 28, no. 1, pp.7–20.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Allix (2000) focuses on transformational leadership rather than distributed leadership. Drawing on the work of Burns (1978), his definition of transformational leadership refers to the transforming leader engaging others 'by recognising and exploiting their needs and demands in such a way that the authentic exigencies of both leaders and followers are satisfied.' The result is a 'relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders ...' (p.9). He goes on to explain that, according to Burns, leadership is a 'special form of power involving a relationship of shared intention or purpose among persons ...' He views power as a relationship and leadership as one aspect of that, through which various resources might be used to influence the behaviour of others. Whilst some of those resources may be related to position within a structure, not all are. It can thus be seen that, from this definition, a leader could exist anywhere in the structure but would need to be able to utilise available resources. It therefore chimes well with the discussion to be found in Harris and Chapman and, to a lesser extent, in Spillane *et al.*

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Like Starratt, Allix does not have any empirical data of his own to present either, as he is critically re-examining the work of Burns (1978) in order to evaluate the 'theory's global and systemic virtues, such as its relative coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness, simplicity, explanatory unity, learnability and fecundity, etc' (p.8).

Other relevant studies

Ayas, K. and Zenuik, N. (2001), 'Project-based Learning: Building Communities of Reflective Practitioners', in *Management Learning*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp.61–76

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The study reported by Ayas and Zenuik was set up to consider the learning potential of what they termed project-based organisations. Whilst they do not discuss the concept of distributed leadership they do debate the possibility of learning through what is in effect distributed leadership, provided the correct culture is in place. This culture they contend has to be based on 'commitment to truth and inquiry ...' (p.62)

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The two cases drawn on by Ayas and Zenuik are not justified, nor is their methodology described or analysis explained. The cases are presented in some detail as descriptions but it is impossible to say how wide the source of data, the tests for accuracy or the method of analysis undertaken. Using these two case studies they 'explore the distinguishing features of project-based learning and ways in which project-based learning can be instrumental in building communities of reflective practitioners'. They conclude that in any task-centred project it is not easy to shift the focus from action to reflection. The change requires 'deliberate attention to learning' which they posit is facilitated by the collaboration with an 'outsider' who brings a broader perspective.

Brytting, T. and Trollestad, C. (2000), 'Managerial Thinking on Value-Based Management', in *International Journal of Value-Based Management*, vol. 13, pp.55–77.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Work reported by Brytting and Trollestad also commented on the need to understand the culture that had preceded the change.

Employees who had never been given the possibility to be really involved and to co-operate, sometimes reacted with passivity and anxiety instead of commitment and enthusiasm. This should not be interpreted as 'the co-workers were uninterested or lacked ability to take on responsibility'. Rather it points out the need for a long-term perspective and the need to be sensitive in the process. (p.67)

This study explored how managers perceived the issue of creating common values, and was industry based. In itself the study was not examining the issue of distributed leadership, but given the high emphasis on values in other literature their findings would seem relevant.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Brytting and Trollestad (2000) provide some background to their thinking before informing us that they used group interviews with small groups of managers (between two and four participants) from each company. These interviews lasted about two hours each. The sample of companies was not intended to be representative but were selected for reputation for 'being active in the field of value-based management' (p.60). A total of 13 companies and 38 managers took part in the interviews. Each interview was fairly unstructured with participants asked to comment on each of the research questions which they provide in the text. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

Two researchers analysed the transcripts, taking account of diverging views within the groups. They grouped responses and looked for links. They also selected a few quotations to act as illustrations.

The aim of the analysis was to get a short and yet as rich a picture as possible of what each interview could tell us about the way in which managers think about these issues. (p.61)

Their preliminary findings were shared with a group of fifteen managers whose opinions they also reflect in the report. They, like Blase and Blase, used quantifying descriptors like 'most', 'majority' and 'minority' to provide some feel for the balance of opinion. They linked responses where appropriate and helpful although there may have been other links which they chose not to report. The minority opinion was reported but how big the minority had to be to warrant being reported was not clear. However, like Ayas and Zenuik, only a very small part of this work is being drawn on here.

From their various studies, Brytting and Trollestad conclude that attempting to lead by values and create common values has great possibilities and great risks. If the talk of leading by values, which is often 'highly humanistic', is not borne out in actual behaviour then the resultant frustration and disappointment leads to a loss of management credibility at least. This may result in disparate actions by different members of the organisation. They also perceive growth in the idea that there is a need for senior managers to 'implement the *correct* values' which is a centralising influence. However, it does not have to be so. They propose that management's role is to 'create resources' for mutual reflection on the values found in the existing culture. From there, the conditions for change in the organisational culture can be created from within the organisation.

Goodman, J., Baron, D. and Myers, C. (2001), 'Bringing democracy to the occupational life of educators in the United States: constructing a foundation for school based reform', in *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp.57–86

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Re-examination by Goodman *et al.* of previous case studies on schools undergoing programmes of school reform led to some interesting pointers on culture. They refer to the emergence of a number of leaders of groups formed to lead reform and act as democratic bodies. The redistribution of power was an accepted and expected effect of trying to increase democracy. The democracy was not set up just for moral reasons, it was considered that consensual decisions minimised the likelihood of teacher non-compliance or subversion and 'helping individuals, either children or adults, 'find their voice' was central to their work. They noted, however, that:

Establishing democratic structures makes the transference of power possible, but it cannot, by itself, promote the on-going reflection and action we hope emerges from our work. It is also necessary to locate those individuals in each school who will assume responsibility for continued facilitation of these reform efforts. ... this structure allows for individuals who have leadership talents to manifest them regardless of their official position in these schools.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The work of Goodman *et al.* (2001) is very different methodologically to the other studies reported in this study. They are reporting on projects in which they have been external change agents. These projects have all been school-based educational reform sited in the USA. They were funded to self-report on five projects that they had been involved with. These reports are based on a review of field records, an analysis of field notes and an assistant interviewing

approximately three quarters of the staff who had been involved in the projects in the schools. They analysed the data from all these sources through the process of 'constant comparison' to gradually develop conceptual categories which they then report under in the paper. They offer large sections of primary data during the course of the report as illustrative material. The amount of interpretation is limited, as it is a very descriptive text with few conclusions. The reader is taken through their experience. Their work is mainly concerned with the transformation of internal school culture through the introduction of democratic principles. They had been criticised in earlier work for their emphasis on governance at the expense of pedagogy. This they justify by drawing on the work of others (for example Fullan, 1993) that states that until a school community can genuinely work together to common values, discussion of pedagogy is pointless talk. They also warn of the possibility of developing a school with a democratic ethos for the adults and an 'unjust and demeaning' educational experience for the students which, they argue, perpetuates an inequitable society.

Coad, A.F. (2000), 'Not everything is black and white for falling dominoes', in Leadership and Organisation Development Journal, vol. 21, no. 6, pp.311–318

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The case study reported by Coad (2000), about a management unit in a hospital, holds important warnings for those wishing to move down the road of distributed leadership. The case study was set up to look at the 'falling dominoes effect' assumed to arise where leaders behaved in transformational ways. This presumed effect consists of subordinates following the example of leaders at higher levels of the organisation and imitating their behaviour. Coad found that it was possible for the behaviour of one or more selfish managers to halt the effect.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Coad (2000) conducted a single case study using a questionnaire to gather staff perceptions in one hospital department of the leadership behaviour of their immediate supervisor. It was designed to test the hypothesis that because an individual experiences transformational leadership they will exhibit those qualities themselves in their leadership practices. The questionnaire asked for a response according to a five-point scale, and was followed up by an interview using a semi-structured schedule which asked for examples. Some aggregated data from the questionnaires are provided but the majority of the findings reported are from the interviews and here the responses are not quantified. Much of the reporting is done on an individual basis and not aggregated. There are a number of quotations to act as illustrations throughout the report. As the case study was set up to test an hypothesis the data from this single case are important. It disproved the hypothesis, and as such it is valid despite the small size.

Karkkainen, M (2000) Teams As Network Builders: Analysing Network Contacts In Finnish Elementary School Teacher Teams. Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 44(4): 371–391

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Karkkainen (2000), drawing on activity theory, deploys a number of concepts which are about the phenomena to which the notion of distributed leadership refers:

- *Team-nets*: internal team-nets are used by organisations to bridge barriers inside them; external ones to bridge boundaries with outside actors (taken from Lipnack & Stamps, 1993).
- *Networks*: Karkkainen uses as a starting point nine contact categories, which she claims (p.377) to have 'identified empirically', to study networks. Her analysis is derived from two over-arching variables:
 - *object-orientatedness*, which (from Engestrom *et al.* 1991) she splits into *co-ordination* (the normal flow of interaction in which actors co-ordinate but do not have shared common object) and *co-operation* (interaction in which actors focus on shared object with mutually acceptable ways of conceptualising and solving it) (p.376)
 - *outward-orientatedness* – expansion of interaction from within team (interaction contacts) to outside it (network contacts) (p.376)
- '*Knot-working*' (from Engestrom *et al.* 1999) – a specific kind of negotiated collaboration across organisational boundaries in which a problem is solved collectively and as immediately as possible by the people involved in the problem. The notion of a knot refers to rapidly distributed and partially improvised orchestration of collaboration between otherwise loosely connected actors. (p.380). This resonates with one of the manifestations of Gronn's concertive leadership, namely spontaneous collaboration.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Karkkainen's study focused on the question, 'under what preconditions will teams make network contacts and break traditional work patterns?' (p.372). This was explored by investigating two teams of teachers in the same school, using multiple types of data – interviews, videoed meetings, shadowing. One of the two teams of teachers was set up by teachers under their own initiative in order to plan and implement the curriculum (the teacher-initiated team), and the other was set a task by administrators to plan and implement elective courses, with the teachers able to decide what kind of courses to plan (the official team). Differences were found between them in the degree to which they developed network contacts beyond the team (outward-orientated networking). The teacher-initiated team was established the year before a wholesale re-organisation of the school into teams and was relatively separate from the rest of the school. However it had a strongly shared common object, namely the development of a local community theme. The team developed active links beyond itself, both within the school and with the community, bringing in, for example, people with local knowledge to help in planning parts of the curriculum. These are characterised as involving both weak ties (with retired teachers, or students' families for example) and strong ties (teachers who are friends for example). The teacher-initiated team was also better at knot-working (defined above) – ie negotiated collaboration in which a problem is solved collectively and as immediately as possible by the people involved in the problem. This Karkkainen describes as 'the seed of a new kind of co-operation' (p.386).

By contrast, the later, official team was more isolationist and less adept at spontaneous problem-solving (knot working). It made few contacts beyond the team within or outside the school. The few contacts made were with 'strong ties', such as the school principal.

Karkkainen concludes that the study 'has contributed ample evidence that changing the teachers' single-handed planning and implementation of their lessons is based on a team of teachers co-operatively building a shared object' (p.389). The findings support Granovetter's (1973) claim that weak ties are the most useful network contacts, and highlight the importance of the object (purpose) as the most crucial element in network building. The process of data collection appears

quite thorough, drawing on sets of data that triangulate the findings. It might be asked how important some of the findings are. For example, the claim that the study 'has contributed ample evidence that changing the teachers' single-handed planning and implementation of their lessons is based on a team of teachers co-operatively building a shared object' (p.389) could in large measure be tautologous. However, the claim that findings highlight the importance of the object (the binding purpose of the team) as the most crucial element in network building seems to point to an important factor, though the fact that the teacher-initiated team whose focus was the local community developed more network contacts outside itself is not that surprising. The usefulness of weak ties for developing networks perhaps points to how these looser relationships encourage a more flexible approach to introducing different perspectives and ideas. In addition the article is a useful source for insights into some relevant concepts (described earlier), mainly from other sources.

Phillips, J.M. (2001) The role of decision influence and team performance in member self-efficacy, withdrawal, satisfaction with the leader and willingness to return . Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 84 (1) pp.122–147

Phillips, J.M., (2002) Antecedents and Consequences of Procedural Justice Perceptions in Hierarchical Decision-making teams, Small Group Research, 33(1): 32–64

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Phillips' (2002) laboratory experiment is about the influence on team members of the processes used by teams in making decisions. It too is concerned with concepts relevant to distributed leadership:

- *Hierarchical teams with distributed expertise*: hierarchical referring to the fact that 'status differences exist among the team members and responsibility for the final decision lies with the leader'; distributed expertise occurring when team members differ in level or type of knowledge and information each brings to the decision problem (p.35). These teams are distinguished from consensus-based teams or groups (p.36).
- *Decision control*: degree of input staff member has to a decision (p.37).
- *Process control*: degree to which staff member has chance to express an opinion about their recommendation beyond the recommendation itself (p.38).

In another laboratory study, Phillips (2001) examined how team performance is affected by the perceived influence of team members on decisions, and by the overall achievements of the team, to identify factors relating to member self-efficacy, withdrawal, satisfaction with the leader and willingness to return for further work.

There are limited applications for distributed leadership, though some indications about how the willingness of followers to contribute to decisions may be linked to their perceptions about the quality of leadership.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Phillips' (2002) research on team processes was a laboratory experiment involving 168 undergraduates who performed a computer task in 42 teams, each team comprising three subordinates and one team leader. Only the subordinates' data were used in the study, so the total sample was 126 (leaders' data has been published separately). The task was a military decision-making simulation. It found that procedural justice (fairness) was positively related to

self-efficacy and satisfaction with the leader, which in turn were related to reduced task withdrawal. Process and decision control were found to independently influence procedural justice perceptions. Some of the implications are:

- fairness strongly influences leadership endorsement
- giving process control helps offset the need to give differential weight (decision control) to different (distributed) expertise
- justice may play an important role in team processes and team viability

The conclusions seem reasonably well grounded in the data, though we are not able to comment in detail on the statistical tests. The relationship between the concepts-as-measured (the conceptual operationalisation) and the theoretical conclusions drawn about the relationship between concepts deserves further attention. For example, the research would need to be replicated in a variety of different settings. Though not of direct relevance to conceptualisation of distributed leadership, the study provides useful ideas on the importance of elements like fairness in co-operative working relationships.

The results are consistent with people valuing a sense of self-identity and self-worth in group work, and not being as concerned with 'concrete, tangible rewards' (p.54). The key conclusion of the study is the importance of enhancing procedural justice perceptions among team members (p.59), or we might say, justice must be done and seen to be done.

Phillips' second study (2001) examined how team performance is affected by the perceived influence of team members on decisions, seeking to identify factors relating to member self-efficacy, withdrawal, satisfaction with the leader and willingness to return for further work. This also was a laboratory task, with a four-person version of a team interaction decision-making exercise, based on a military task (Hollenbeck *et al.*, 1997). The 228 participants were American undergraduates: 55% were male and 45% female. Participants were asked to indicate at the end their willingness to return and carry out further work with the same team.

In depth statistical analysis of the data was carried out to determine standard deviations, intercorrelation of variables etc and is explained in some detail. The conclusions seem robust and well supported by the data. The artificial nature of the task, however, makes it impossible to generalise from the findings. The author herself points out that the participants were all undergraduates, they were in short-term teams, and there were financial rewards offered for high achievement which were solely team-based. Moreover the task was entirely computer-mediated, with no face to face interaction. Given the complexity of team working, one could not guarantee to replicate the findings exactly.

Phillips found team viability outcomes were more favourable for members of teams which performed well, regardless of how much influence members perceived their individual contribution had to its performance. Team members were inclined to be less committed if their team was not performing well, and members of high performing teams were consistently more willing than members of lower performing teams to return for further work. Team performance had a strong positive correlation with satisfaction with the leader; this satisfaction depended heavily on whether the leader made good decisions on the team's behalf.

Kayworth, T. & Leidner, D. (2002) *The global virtual manager: a prescription for success*. Journal of Management Information Systems, 18 (3) pp.7–40

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Kayworth and Leidner conceptualised distributed leadership as leadership from a remote physical location, using only technological means of communication (e-mail, web-based etc). The theories they offer are grounded in the data they collected.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Kayworth and Leidner created 12 virtual teams, in three different countries, who completed mandatory projects. Outcomes were compared with team members' responses to a series of open-ended questions at the end of the project, to obtain their views about team effectiveness and the effectiveness of their team leader. Pattern analysis was first done case by case to identify unique insights, and then the broad spectrum of patterns was considered across all the teams. Though details of how this was done are not given, the general approach appears sound.

Critical factors for success were summarised under four main headings: communication, culture, technology and project management (leadership). The conclusions appear valid; most are supported by literature about non-virtual teams. For example, communication, culture and project management are all crucial to 'real' as well as virtual teams.

Successful leaders of these physically dispersed teams were identified as setting clear team goals, giving continuous feedback on performance, building team cohesiveness, able to empathise with team members, and showing cultural awareness.

Time, distance and cultural variation are particular challenges to physically dispersed teams. Achievement of effective communication is essential if such teams are to achieve their goals effectively. Frequent communication and plentiful feedback from leaders proved critical to success. Effective leaders also set good ground rules for this communication. They were also aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and managed these well.

Potentially, the importance of communication, cultural understanding and effective management applies to all teams and to leadership at all levels of an organisation. This is not new, but it is interesting that they claim that their data indicate that it applies in virtual teams as well as other kinds of teams. This may strengthen the possibility that 'teamness' is socially constructed in similar ways whatever the environment.

Bharki, R., Jacob, V.S., Pipino, L. & Pirkul, H. (1998) *A Study of the effect of communication channel and authority on group decision processes and outcomes*, Decision support systems, 23: 205–226

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Experimental work by Bharki *et al.* found that face-to-face (FTF) groups outperform computer mediated communication (CMC) groups and are more satisfied with the solution to the task, though they are more frustrated with the process; that the leader has no effect (reasons for this are discussed, and the lack of effect could relate to particular conditions of experiment); that FTF groups with a leader reveal their information more truthfully than CMC groups with a leader; (CMC reveal more truthfully when they do not have a leader).

Bharki *et al.*'s ideas or concepts offer some stimulating thoughts on the *reasons* for variability between FTF and CMC groups and what implications these may have for distributed leadership in practice. In particular, they identify:

- *Mixed-motivation tasks*, where the group has mixed interests. This helps to delineate the nature of tasks a group may work on, and indicates the potential disadvantages of some groups.
- *De-individuation*, representing submergence in a group which produces loss of individual identity. This can affect group performance.
- *Media richness*, from Media Richness Theory which, *inter alia*, classifies communication media along a continuum of low to high richness. For example, face-to-face communication is rich, and so is better for mixed-motive and equivocal tasks.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

For the purposes of this review, the interest in Bharki *et al.* lies not in the findings *per se*, but in the ideas they suggest. Their findings on the effectiveness of FTF groups over CMC groups raise many questions about the applicability of each kind of group in different, especially real-life, situations.

Hallinger, P. & Kantamara, P. (2000) *Educational Change in Thailand: opening a window onto leadership as a cultural process*, *School Leadership & Management*, 20(2):189–205

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Although it is not explicitly defined as a concept, Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) in their study of Thai school directors viewed participatory management styles as involving specific steps to:

- build widespread support for the vision of change
- reduce the 'status gap' between themselves and their stakeholders
- gather information that reflected a broad range of perspectives from stakeholders prior to and during the adoption of school changes

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Hallinger and Kantamara's (2000) study examined change processes in Thai schools through the conceptual lens of national culture and explored how Thai school leaders respond to demands of traditional culture as they 'modernise' schools (pp.190–1). It focused on three schools which had demonstrated success in 'modernising' and collected data through focus groups with teachers and more extensive individual interviews with each of the principals. Two days were spent at each school. A thematic analysis of the data was employed, focusing on instances of change strategies. The three schools were selected from among 139 schools that participated in a systemic school reforms project. These three were nominated by the Project Director as having successfully implemented and maintained the desired reforms over a seven year period. Despite 'compliance' orientated Thai culture, successful school directors used 'decidedly participatory management styles' (p.195).

... the predominant tendency of Thai school administrators is to rely heavily on position power when implementing new policies or programmes. In light of this, we were surprised

to find that all three Directors used decidedly participatory management styles. Although it manifested itself in different ways, each of the Directors took specific steps:

- to build widespread support for the vision of change;
- to reduce the 'status gap' between themselves and their stakeholders;
- to gather information that reflected a broad range of perspectives from stakeholders prior to and during the adoption of school changes

This was demonstrated in their approaches to building visions for change in the schools. Contrary to the top-down vision approach favoured by many Thai leaders, these principals involved all stakeholders – students, teachers, parents, community members – in setting direction for change.' (p.195)

The study concludes with several propositions about leading change, including 'Formal leaders must use strategies that counter traditional norms of deference and bring staff concerns to the surface so they may understand and address staff resistance' (p.199).

Hallinger and Kantamara's claims are appropriately measured. The article acknowledges that its concluding propositions cannot be confirmed by their single case study and have only 'face validity' (p.199). Their study gives interesting insights into the importance of the wider culture in influencing response to leadership style – in this instance a deferential culture means it takes time and special initiatives (eg 'disarmament' strategies designed to reduce the power distance between themselves and their constituencies) for people to utilise the opportunities of a participatory style; the importance of a spirit of fun at work; surface compliance accompanied by passive resistance. It is interesting that the Thai leaders took the 'surprising' (p.201) strategy of participatory style in order to implement change. Their study also highlights the balance that is sought between the leader applying pressure for change and encouraging participation and harmony. Hallinger and Kantamara further suggest, in a comment that reflects our earlier discussion of the studies by Bryant and Kets de Vries, that if:

leadership entails getting results through other people... then we can only understand the nature of leadership by exposing the hidden assumptions of the cultural context. This will open new windows through which to view educational leadership. (p.202)

Harris, A. & Hopkins, D. Alternative perspectives on school improvement. School Leadership and Management, 20 (1) pp.9–15

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

The notion of cultural change is mentioned by Harris and Hopkins (2000), who suggest that school improvement includes building a school's capacity for cultural change, commitment to staff development, and the consistent use of action research to drive improvement forward. Silva *et al.* (2000) (reviewed above), within their notion of 'third wave leadership', talk about 'reculturing' schools and 'providing space for teachers to meaningfully participate in our schools as organizations' (pp.780–1). Leadership is embedded within the work all classroom teachers do on behalf of children, thus challenging 'the typical hierarchical structure of schools by dispersing leadership responsibility across educators' (p.782).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Harris and Hopkins were theorising from the writing of Fullan (1992) and Joyce *et al.* (1999), reflecting on these authors through outcomes from the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) project published in the same journal (Hopkins and Levin, 2000; Harris and Young, 2000; West, 2000; and Jackson, 2000).

Extending the concept: Students and distributed leadership

Most of the writers on school leadership whose work we have reviewed see it as an activity undertaken by professionals on behalf of professionals, through whose work teaching and learning take place. Bickmore (2001) explores a much wider understanding of leadership by posing a central question in relation to the top-down/bottom-up distinction visible in many discussions of distributed leadership. Who are the community within which leadership should become distributed? Her answer represents an extension of the concept of distributed leadership within education to give it a more explicit focus on students.

Bickmore (2001) Student Conflict Resolution, Power 'sharing' in Schools, and Citizenship Education. Curriculum Inquiry, vol. 31, no. 2, pp.137–162

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Bickmore suggests that the school community within which learning takes place should not be limited to the school staff, but should include the students themselves, and that this should apply in the primary sector as much as secondary. She emphasises the arguments outlined above from the work of Leithwood and Jantzi and Spillane *et al.*, and discussed elsewhere by Grint (2000), that leadership depends on influence, that influence is exercised through relationships, and that the key to influence is the respect of those being influenced. Bickmore's focus is on problems and disputes within the student body, and she explores a variety of versions of peer mediation. Her analysis incorporates the idea of distributed leadership as situational, resting on informal as well as formal position, and on the willingness of others to accept as legitimate the attempt by the individual to influence the actions of another. This reflects the move of some IQEA schools to create research groups that include students to explore school issues (see Jackson, 2000).

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Bickmore draws on data from a larger study to present case studies of six elementary schools within a single American school district that was implementing a peer mediation scheme. Peer mediation schemes involve creating arrangements through which school children can intervene in disputes between fellow pupils and try to resolve them. The purpose of the scheme was to develop in young children the values of democratic citizenship, which were stated to include critical reasoning and shared decision making.

The paper presents a summary of the overall project from which the cases were drawn, and explains how the data were collected: a range of observations and interviews with a wide variety of peer mediators, other pupils, school staff, school administrators, and programme members. Three specific research questions are stated, of which the third is relevant to this study. This examines the ways in which adults and context factors within the school affect the extent to which students are able to share authority and engage in conflict mediation activities.

Bickmore argues that two factors appeared to affect the success of the peer mediation scheme in its aim of promoting democratic citizenship. These were the basis on which students were selected as mediators and the extent to which they were constrained by procedures. The two are

presented as manifestations of the same fundamental problem, which was the degree to which adults in the school were prepared to release students from official control. When mediators were selected because they were academically successful or well behaved, they were seen as having status among the adults but not necessarily among their peers. These schemes were less successful than those where the mediators were chosen on the basis of perceived peer status, which often involved including some badly behaved pupils.

Schemes were also more effective when the mediators were charged with solving problems they themselves identified rather than operating as an extra arm of the school system – being ‘one of the intermediary steps on the way up to [the principal’s] office.’ (p.151). In these latter cases, the students’ mediating actions were tightly constrained – in one case their teachers gave them ‘scripts’ to use in mediations – and they were given little opportunity to carry out their work. They were limited to dealing with issues brought to them by their peers or referred to them by teachers.

In the former cases, when mediators were seen as having a problem-solving function, rather than being used as a disciplinary arm, the staff who advised and monitored them operated in a facilitative rather than a controlling way, and the mediators became more confident, so that they started to intervene proactively in disputes to prevent them escalating. Further, they generated their own codes of conduct and disciplined their colleagues when they breached them, on one occasion demanding that the miscreant be removed from the list of mediators for a period. In this development of a more proactive role, the pupils were supported by the principal, who increasingly enjoined staff to relinquish some of their traditional disciplinary role and responsibilities for behaviour control to the mediators.

Bickmore argues that the peer mediation scheme was successful when there was a structural loosening of the school so as to accept the possibility of multiple sources of leadership within it and multiple directions of leadership action. This demands significant changes to any hidden curriculum that may otherwise be working against its development, such as was demonstrated by the advisers who sought to incorporate the programme into the school’s existing formal disciplinary structure. By extension of this, Bickmore is asking what the role of the school principal or headteacher is in distributed leadership. To what extent are heads concerned with creating a set of constraints resting on a set of shared values that they have articulated or should they be prepared to change practice and policies in response to challenges to those values from within the school? Bickmore suggests that the agreed values underpinning the mediation programme at a macro level are concerned with the basis of good citizenship rather than school culture and purpose, which may work against its operation. So may it be with distributed leadership.

This study also asks another question that has received little attention to date. Sanctioning peer mediation roles and responsibilities can be argued to extend the traditional boundaries of decision making within the school. Who, then, should be regarded as the members of the community within which leadership should be distributed? What are the potential implications for members of what might be called the traditional community if its boundaries are extended to include those who previously were not seen as full members?

Bickmore’s arguments have considerable potential significance for the practice of distributed leadership. However, although the data are suggestive, they rest on a small number of in-depth case studies. It would be appropriate to conduct more extensive research designed to explore the implications of wider student involvement in distributed leadership arrangements, so as to test her suggestions.

Overall evaluation: The strength of the research evidence

In this appendix we have outlined the data and the arguments put forward by the empirical studies we found that were relevant to the development of distributed leadership as a concept. We conclude by commenting briefly on the empirical work as a whole.

Relatively few of the empirical studies examined in this review employed what might be considered traditionally robust social scientific data in the sense that the EPPI reviews might accept. Leithwood and Jantzi have presented statistically analysed data from an extensive survey, and have conducted a replicatory study of earlier work. The studies by Bharki *et al.* and Phillips were experimental. Portin's study rested on statistical analysis of survey data. All the other studies we examined were qualitative studies, often very small in scale. Despite this apparent contrast in data, both forms of study allow us to make both positive and negative comments concerning the quality of the research and what might be drawn from it in relation to distributed leadership.

We judge the data from the five statistical or experimental studies analysed to be robust. However, it is appropriate to acknowledge the limitations that their authors themselves place upon their work as well as making our own comments. Portin is at pains to point out that the context of his study – the policy situation in Washington State – may limit the degree to which his findings may be generalised within the United States, and it is reasonable to assume that he would voice similar concerns about any international generalisation that might be attempted. We recognise that, even so, there may be some justification for a very cautious generalisation to contexts with similar policy structures, as in England. Leithwood and Jantzi acknowledge that, whilst they offer an interpretation of their study that is based on a previously-articulated theory of leadership, alternative interpretations can be offered that support a quite different perception of what leadership is. Phillips' studies of team dynamics are potentially important in analysing the relationship between role, formal status and action in distributed settings, as well as the importance of perceived fairness. Bharki *et al.*'s experimental study of virtual teams, whilst interesting, is essentially the beginning of a research programme. Both need further replication in order to build a sound body of evidence. As a result of these comments, we judge the data and arguments put forward by these studies to be suggestive rather than conclusive.

A similar judgement can be made about the three cross-cultural studies we identified which explored leadership in non-Western societies. Two of them are clear about their methodology, but one – Kets de Vries – is not. All of them, however, suggest a tension between leadership theory as developed in western Europe and the dominant Eurocentric North American culture and alternative cultural understandings of leadership. As was suggested above, two points can be made from these studies. First, we should not necessarily be limited to perceptions of leadership that vest it in a person – a point that provides support for some arguments about distributed leadership. Second, we should be aware of wider social and political perceptions of leadership, which may influence both internal and external processes through which the development of distributed leadership is attempted.

We also have two major conceptual discussions of distributed leadership, by Spillane *et al.* and Gronn. Spillane's study presents a small amount of data in the shape of three vignettes drawn from their research, whilst Gronn reanalyses a number of studies to test the utility of his theorisation of the term. Both are important as indicators of the kinds of research that might be undertaken to strengthen our understandings of the forms of leadership activity that might be regarded as distributed. Once again, as these authors would acknowledge, their writings are suggestive of further development rather than conclusive.

Most of the empirical studies examined in this report are forms of qualitative case studies in organisational settings. There is a wide variety of scale and focus within them, but most of them are small-scale activities: the largest study reviewed, that of Harris and Chapman, examined ten schools using data from some fifty interviews. However, many of them appear to be reporting on aspects of larger studies, and it is important that we should gain as much information about them as possible. It is also important to recognise that case study data are frequently aggregative, and a range of small-scale case studies can build a substantial body of evidence over time. At present, however, the number of relevant studies remains small, and once again the evidence they generate must be judged to be indicative rather than conclusive.

This overall judgement of the strength and robustness of the data summarised in this report, however, should not be seen as criticising the work reviewed. Rather, it provides us with a set of propositions about the nature of distributed leadership and some possible lines of further research to explore and test the theory further.

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